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**'A touchstone the written word' : experimental Calvinist life-writing and the anxiety of reading salvation.**

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**“A Touchstone the Written Word”:**

**Experimental Calvinist Life-Writing and the Anxiety of Reading Salvation 1650-1689**

**Sophie Oxenham**

**King's College  
University of London  
Phd**



***“a history of reading that strives to grasp...  
communities of readers and their arts of reading”***

**[Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books*]**

## **Thesis Abstract**

### **“A Touchstone the Written Word”:**

### **Experimental Calvinist Life-Writing and the Anxiety of Reading Salvation 1650-1689**

**Sophie Oxenham**

**King’s College, University of London**

The experimental Calvinist community of readers, gripped by the theology of double predestination, was subject to the alternative prospects of reprobation or election, and this produced an intense scrutiny of self and experience for signs of salvation. The thesis first explores the dynamics of this anxiety, and examines how it impacted upon the relationship experimental Calvinists had with the Bible as a potential source of saving grace. It finds that spiritual insecurity expressed itself in complex tensions between two modes of reading: ‘hermeneutical’ and ‘experimental’ (or experiential), textual and oral, active and passive, ‘legal’ and ‘saving’. These models of Puritan engagement with the Bible have become common knowledge, but the strain many experimental Calvinists felt in negotiating their way between them, and the precise role played by different forms of life-writing in its alleviation, has not been fully recognised. This study investigates the tensions between ‘legal’ and ‘saving’ reading, and the arts or strategies employed in the attempt to resolve them. Saving reading was associated with orality, legal with the ‘dead letter’, but where the former was supposed to be a guarantee of presence, it was also an index of absence, of fleeting temporality. Autobiographical writers manipulated inscription and narrative in order to address their need for assurance to be both present and permanent, a need that could not be satisfied by experimental reading of the Bible alone. Their texts constitute a material ‘re-reading’ that attempts to fix, through pen, ink, and publication, the transient nature of an affective scriptural witness. It is found that diaries, conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies depart from the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of saving reading even as they strive to belong to it, and it is only through looking across the range of their life-writing that one can discern a tacit rehabilitation of the ‘poor relation’ of reading, a mode that is active, hermeneutic and inscribed. Together, these works enact a developing experimental Calvinist art of reading salvation.



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### **A Note on Texts**

Several editions of William Perkins' *A Golden Chaine* in English were published, most notably the first of 1591, and a second revised and enlarged edition of 1597. Citations are made from both these editions as appropriate, and the source is indicated in the footnotes.

John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* first appeared in 1666, with additions made to the undated third edition, possibly of 1674, and to the fifth edition of 1680. Citations are from the first edition, unless otherwise stated.

Where possible, works originally in other languages – for example, those by Calvin and Luther – are presented in translations of the period.



**Introduction : “a history of reading that strives to grasp... communities of readers and their arts of reading”<sup>1</sup>**

*There is a spiritual saving understanding of the Mystery and Truths contained in the Scriptures; and a rational understanding of the words, and propositions, wherein those Mysteries and Truths, are contained and exhibited to us, (which is not a double... or twofold understanding of the Scriptures, but the same act of our mind under various qualifications is intended.) [John Owen]<sup>2</sup>*

*The Word telleth us what Faith is, and the Spirit worketh and acteth faith in us, and by its Irradiations, helpeth us to see it in ourselves, and to say [but I beleeve] and then the Conclusion followeth from the Word, Therefore I shall be Saved...*

*The uncertaintie about the witness, may create as much dissatisfaction, as anything else; yea, it raiseth a new ground of perplexitie...*

*The works that have passed upon thy heart being discerned, thou mayest examine and measure them by the written word whither they be speciall or common: if thou be'st ready to doubt and question whither these be sufficient to testifie adoption or not, by renewed recourses to the Word, thou mayest finde what they are: whether they be such as that calleth graces or not... Satan hath a great deal of Chymistry, he hath many things like graces... which are not those graces; and therefore it behoveth the most confident soules often to try their grounds, and here is a touchstone the written word that will never faile; this will discover his most glistening counterfeit coine. [Samuel Petto]<sup>3</sup>*

**Introduction**

The experimental Calvinist “community of readers”, gripped by the theology of double predestination, was subject to the alternative prospects of election and reprobation, and this produced an intense scrutiny of self and experience for signs of salvation. Weak believers were advised to look to the Bible as a source of saving grace. Importantly, the Scriptures were also considered the means whereby those of weak faith could be made sure that they were saved. The ‘reading’ of salvation, then, was intimately connected to one’s reading of the Bible. However, the anxiety generated by double predestination spilled over into the experimental Calvinist relationship with Scripture, and expressed itself in complex tensions between two models of reading: rational and spiritual, hermeneutical and ‘experimental’ (or experiential), textual and oral, active and passive, ‘legal’ and ‘saving’. These models of Puritan engagement with the Bible have become common knowledge, but the strain many experimental Calvinists felt in steering their way between them, and the precise role played by different forms of autobiographical writing in its alleviation, has not been fully

<sup>1</sup> Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), p. viii.

<sup>2</sup> John Owen, ‘To the Christian Reader’, in Henry Lukin, *Introduction to Holy Scripture* (London: [n. pub.], 1669), sig. A7<sup>r</sup>.



recognised. The leading Independent John Owen's assertion that the two modes of reading represented "not a double...or twofold understanding", but a single "act of mind", is typical in its aspiration towards integration, and many have been content to accept such ambition at face value, ignoring the unease that lies behind its defensive tone.<sup>4</sup> As will be seen, while wary of discarding the written word altogether, experimental Calvinists privileged affective experience of the Spirit above interpretation of its Letter as saving reading, and this distinction was a source of extreme anxiety. Samuel Petto (another prominent Independent) also tried to suggest that the two models of reading were mutually supportive in his notion of the written word of Scripture as a touchstone by which to discern the operations of the Spirit. However, the "new ground of perplexitie" he observed, caused by insistence on a spiritual witness through the Word as a prerequisite of conversion, was not so easily satisfied. This study explores the nature of that perplexity: it investigates the origins and nature of the tensions between 'legal' and 'saving' reading, and the arts or strategies employed in the attempt to resolve them. From this perspective the idea of the written word as a touchstone by which to discern the workings of the Spirit develops another, more subversive resonance from that intended by Petto. Rather than alluding to the scriptural Letter - often a further source of anxiety for weak believers - it serves instead to evoke the attempts made by experimental Calvinists to write themselves into saving reading through shifting modes of autobiographical inscription. Such endeavours were to bring their authors into complex and difficult relations with the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of reading - a creed which insistently privileged experimental reading - as they sought to ease its internal stresses without deviating from its tenets.

The endeavour to understand a particular "community of readers" and its "arts of reading" is no less problematic a task than the attempt to read the will of an elusive God. In *The Order of Books*, Roger Chartier argues that, unlike writing, which is "conservative, fixed, durable", reading is "always of the order of the ephemeral", and comments on the challenge this presents to

any history that hopes to inventory and make sense out of a practice (reading) that only rarely leaves traces, that is scattered in an infinity of singular acts, and that easily shakes off all constraints...the paradox underlying any history of reading...is that it must postulate the liberty of a practice that it can only grasp, massively, in its determinations.<sup>5</sup>

The life-writings<sup>6</sup> produced by this community of readers - diaries, conversion narratives, and spiritual autobiographies - are the most immediate field of 'determination' for the experimental

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<sup>3</sup> Samuel Petto, *The Voice of the Spirit*, (London: Livewell Chapman, 1654), pp. 24, 71, 167-168.

<sup>4</sup> For an overview of the critical legacy on Puritan models of reading, see chapter three, p. 91, footnote 2.

<sup>5</sup> Chartier, pp. 1, 19.

<sup>6</sup> The term 'life-writing' is used interchangeably with the term 'autobiographical writing' in this thesis to denote a range of forms, with particular reference to diaries, conversion narratives, and spiritual autobiographies.



Calvinist relationship with the Word. However, such writings are not merely the secondary traces of an event that happens elsewhere (although they may themselves sometimes make that claim). Saving reading was associated with orality, legal with the ‘dead Letter’<sup>7</sup>, but where the former was supposed to be a guarantee of presence, it was also an index of absence, of fleeting temporality. Autobiographical writers manipulated inscription in order to address their need for assurance to be both present and permanent, a need that could not be satisfied by experimental reading of the Bible alone. Their texts *constitute* a material re-reading that attempts to fix, through pen, ink, and publication, the transient nature of an affective scriptural witness. Their concerns, then, parallel our own critical problems as outlined by Chartier, but for them the ephemeral nature of reading was a source not of liberty but of distress. In different ways, and to varying degrees, diaries, conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies depart from the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of saving reading, while simultaneously striving to belong to it. It is only through looking across the range of their life-writing that one can discern a tacit rehabilitation of the ‘poor relation’ of reading, a mode that is active, hermeneutic and inscribed. As diaries are joined by the newer forms of conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies, this mode emerges from the shadows to occupy the centre of their enterprise. Together they constitute a developing experimental Calvinist ‘art of reading’.

At this point, some definitions and qualifications need to be made. The term ‘experimental’ was used by seventeenth-century Calvinists to mean ‘experiential’, with particular reference to an affective spiritual experience of grace. The phrase ‘experimental Calvinist’ has been used more recently by John Stachniewski to denote the “form of Calvinism promoted by preachers for whom the quest for signs was a central preoccupation”, a form “based... on the evidence of experience”.<sup>8</sup> As will become clear in the following chapter, the English theology of double predestination was by no means the exclusive product of Calvin, but nonetheless, an analysis of the self-recoiling syntax of his *Institutes of Christian Religion* establishes him as a worthy namesake for the habits of reading that dogged those who followed in his steps. This thesis adapts the term experimental Calvinist to refer more specifically to Independents and Presbyterians before the Act of Uniformity in 1662, and to nonconformist Calvinists, which included both, after it. Their experimental Calvinism can be distinguished from earlier forms by shifts in their ecclesiology, and by a context of increasing religious marginalisation. That being said, the investigation straddles the Restoration, for the emergence of Independent gathered churches, and the publication of their Conversion Narratives in

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<sup>7</sup> The notion of the ‘dead Letter’ derives from II Corinthians 3:6 “The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life”. *Geneva Bible*, (Madison, Milwaukee and London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969; facsimile of 1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1560), fol. 84<sup>r</sup> [All biblical citations, unless otherwise stated, are from this edition.] Calvin commented on this passage: “by the name of letter he meaneth externall preaching which toucheth not the harte: and by the Spirit, lively doctrine which worketh effectually in mens myndes by the grace of the Spirit.” Jean Calvin, *A commentarie Upon S. Pauls Epistles to the Corinthians*, trans. by Thomas Tymme (London: John Harrison and George Byshop, 1577), fol. 225<sup>r</sup>.



the early 1650s, is integral to the development of the life-writings that follow. Thus, while the focus of attention lies between 1650 and 1689 - the date of the Toleration Act and a significantly altered context for Calvinism<sup>9</sup> – the thesis necessarily looks before and after those dates. In particular, it examines the legacy of the Reformed Theology of the Sixteenth Century, and the early Puritan<sup>10</sup> tradition of self-examination and diary-writing.

While this study adheres to the seventeenth-century sense of the word ‘experimental’, the term is also shadowed by its more modern connotation, suggestive of the day-by-day working out required to make one’s reading conform to the model required for salvation. As such, it serves as a silent reminder that while these Calvinists privileged an affective experience of the Bible above its interpretation (while insisting on both), one should approach their representations of reading with a due measure of critical detachment: the reality was often more problematic than they could openly admit.

Having established the meaning of the phrase, one might question the extent to which, amidst shifting circumstances, experimental Calvinists – Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Particular Baptists among them – can be considered a ‘community of readers’.<sup>11</sup> It is important not to ignore the significant variances in their perspectives and practices, nor to forget their ongoing conflicts. Their differences are examined in chapter two, and the impact of them upon the formation of autobiographical genres is discussed in the course of the final three chapters. However, to the following extent they can indeed be considered a community: they all subscribed to the theology of double predestination within a context of religious marginalisation; all were preoccupied with their relationship to a single text, the Bible, as a source of salvation; all considered an affective experience of the Word to be the essence of saving reading; and all employed (and read each other’s) life-writing as a means of negotiating the above.

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<sup>8</sup> John Stachniewski, ‘Introduction’, *John Bunyan, Grace Abounding with other Spiritual Autobiographies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. xii.

<sup>9</sup> On the Toleration Act see Richard Greaves, *John Bunyan and English Nonconformity* (London and Rio Grande: Hambledon Press, 1992), pp. 207-222.

<sup>10</sup> It has become something of a ritual to define the term ‘Puritan’ whenever it is used. It is employed in this thesis more broadly than it would have been in the seventeenth century, to represent all those who subscribed to the theology of double predestination throughout the century, as opposed to the particular community of experimental Calvinists with which this study is primarily concerned.

<sup>11</sup> The use of sectarian labels should not be allowed to obscure the degree of fluidity and movement across the different groups, particularly between Congregationalists and Particular Baptists. Isabel Rivers asks a similar question: “How far was nonconformity an artificial, legally defined category which temporarily brought together disparate, heterogeneous groups, and how far did it represent a cohesive body of beliefs and attitudes? Are the similarities more important than the differences?” She concludes that “differences of ancestry, discipline, doctrine and influence should not obscure the significance of [their] similarities...as nonconformists in contrast to the latitudinarians”. Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780, Volume I Whichcote to Wesley* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 99, 163.



The first two chapters of the thesis consider the dynamics of the anxiety produced by the reformed theology of double predestination, and the specific context of experimental Calvinism. The third chapter examines how that theology created a fundamental instability in experimental Calvinist reading of the Bible. The final three chapters explore how diaries, conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies made use of differing strategies of inscription in an attempt to redress the failure of experimental reading to secure assurance of salvation. The range of this inquiry means that, at different points, it intersects with a number of critical fields, ranging from narratology to the Western metaphysics of presence, from theories of autobiography, to the materiality of cultural practices.<sup>12</sup> Each is too large to be adequately summarised here; where pertinent the critical context is addressed in the relevant chapter. However, there are two primary, connected areas of scholarship to which this project stands in closest relation: Puritan constructions of language and reading, and seventeenth-century autobiographical writing.

### Puritan Constructions of Language and Reading: the Critical Context

There have been a great many studies on the Puritan imagination and its language. The scale of critical industry on the subject means that it is not possible to provide an exhaustive survey here; what follows focuses upon those works that have the most direct bearing upon the two models of experimental Calvinist reading which form the central concern of this thesis. Scholarship on puritan modes of reading which is pertinent to the present study can be divided between two main disciplinary perspectives, the theological / historical and the literary.

Among works that approach the subject from a perspective that is primarily theological, three books stand out as being of particular relevance to our understanding of the experimental Calvinist models of reading: Geoffrey F. Nuttall's *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, (1946); Norman Pettit's *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* (1966), and Dewey D. Wallace's *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology 1525-1695* (1982). Nuttall provides a valuable account of the development of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit among seventeenth-century Puritans,<sup>13</sup> focusing primarily on Congregationalists, Presbyterians and

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<sup>12</sup> 'The Western Metaphysics of Presence' refers to the tradition of Plato and Christian Logocentrism, a tradition contested by Derrida and his notion of 'Différance'. Jaques Derrida, 'Différance', in *Speech and Phenomena, and other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. by David B. Allison (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp.129-160. 'The materiality of cultural practices' alludes to the critical approach (originally associated with Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield) which assumes that a consideration of the means and conditions of the production of writing should be integral to the analysis of it. See, for example, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield, *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> For Nuttall's broad definition of Puritanism, which includes Quakers, see *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), pp. 9-14. Quakers are excluded from the present study on the grounds that they rejected the theology of double predestination.



Quakers. His chapter on 'The Spirit and the Word' concludes, after a brief appraisal of comments on the matter by writers such as Owen, Petto, and Baxter, that "The Spirit speaks in, by or through the Word. Dissociation of the two is condemned."<sup>14</sup> However, he fails to recognise the unease that made necessary such polemical reinforcements of the correct approach to Scripture, a 'perplexity' that, as has been seen, even Petto himself acknowledged. Such neglect is in part due to Nuttall's own Congregationalist beliefs; the extent to which he is himself party to the models of reading he sets out to record becomes apparent in his 'critical conclusion', in which he states of the Scriptures that "We still acknowledge the working of God's Spirit in their composition."<sup>15</sup>

Nuttall's work has since been joined by less partisan studies, but nonetheless the common perception persists of an experimental Calvinist integration of Word and word, strengthened by a wariness of the excesses of radical 'enthusiasts' who eschewed the Letter altogether.<sup>16</sup> For example, in *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life*, Pettit is more alert to a paradox that is fundamental to the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading, drawing attention to the contradiction of a doctrine of 'preparation' within a theology of predestination that insisted on man's impotence. However, his concern is limited to the theological, and does not extend as far as the Puritan reading of the Bible. In one respect this thesis picks up where he leaves off, considering how the contradiction of preparation within predestination lay at the root of experimental Calvinist ambivalence towards the figure of the reader.

Wallace provides the most extensive account of the vicissitudes that beset the theology of double predestination in *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology 1525-1695*. He considers the impact of Arminianism and Antinomianism upon the formation of nonconformist parties, and traces the route whereby, by the end of the seventeenth century, the theology of predestination had become "refined, systematized, and even ossified...an embattled point of view, no longer at the centre of the intellectual culture of the day."<sup>17</sup> He provides a seminal critique of the scholastic arguments that characterised wrangles over the doctrine of grace, and in the process delineates the theological spectrum of nonconformity. However, his analysis does not extend to the Experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading the Bible, or to the role of self-examination in redressing it.

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<sup>14</sup> Nuttall, *Holy Spirit*, p. 33.

<sup>15</sup> Nuttall, *Holy Spirit*, p. 173.

<sup>16</sup> On the language of radical enthusiasm, see Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

<sup>17</sup> Dewey D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology 1525-1695* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 189. Importantly, from the point of view of this thesis which argues that nonconformist Calvinists can be considered a 'community of readers' in spite of their differences, he notes that "the extent to which the Baxterian and Presbyterian divines stated the piety of grace in terms consonant with those of the stricter Calvinist Congregationalists is surprising." Wallace, p. 186.



Unlike Nuttall, Pettit and Wallace, John Carroll approaches double predestination from a socio-psychological perspective, and thus is able to offer different insights into Calvinist anxiety, on which he provides a powerful and acute analysis in *Puritan, Paranoid, Remissive: A Sociology of Modern Culture* (1977); *Guilt: the Grey Eminence behind Character, History and Culture* (1985); and *Humanism: The Wreck of Western Culture* (1993) - a body of work that has been neglected by most literary critics working on Puritanism. Carroll gives a perceptive account of Calvinism as a desperate attempt to create assurance where there was none, arguing that it is “a theology of ambivalence” built upon “a whole series of dualisms”, and that “here lies its deepest psychological pull.”<sup>18</sup> Those dualisms are explored at length in chapter one, while chapter two considers others more particular to the experimental Calvinist context that lie beyond Carroll’s purview.<sup>19</sup>

Nuttall, Pettit, Wallace and Carroll provide valuable accounts of the theology of double predestination, and go some way towards identifying its internal tensions. This thesis is indebted to their work, but takes the enquiry in a new and different direction. It focuses more determinedly upon the epistemological uncertainty generated by double predestination, and considers how those structures of anxiety shaped experimental Calvinist reading of the Word.

Among literary studies which emphasise a theological context as a rubric for approaching a range of Puritan reading and writing, John R. Knott, in *The Sword of the Spirit: Puritan Responses to the Bible*, looks at the impact of a concept of the “living Word” upon writers he considers to represent “different moments in the evolution of a Puritan spirituality” and a “variety of genres”.<sup>20</sup> He traces the emergence of a notion of the ‘living Word’<sup>21</sup>, and concludes that while “all English Protestants would agree that in some sense the Bible expressed the “living” Word of God... Yet the Bible was much more alive for some than for others, in the sense that they felt themselves dramatically changed through confronting the Word”.<sup>22</sup> In his haste to qualify his argument with the valid point that the “contrasting attitudes towards Scripture” represented by Letter and Spirit “overlap at various times and in various people”, rather than constituting “two clearly defined traditions”<sup>23</sup>, he fails to

<sup>18</sup> *Puritan, Paranoid, Remissive: A Sociology of Modern Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 128.

<sup>19</sup> Most notably, the dualism between fellowship and separation that was a founding principle of the gathered churches. The shifts in the perception of the relationship between grace and works are also examined in more detail than Carroll’s expansive range allows for.

<sup>20</sup> The writers and genres Knott considers are: Richard Sibbes (the Puritan sermon), Richard Baxter (meditation), Gerald Winstanley (the radical tract) Milton (poetry and polemical prose), and Bunyan (spiritual autobiography and religious allegory). John R. Knott, *The Sword of the Spirit: Puritan Responses to the Bible* (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 1980).

<sup>21</sup> Knott, pp. 13-41.

<sup>22</sup> Knott, p. 39.

<sup>23</sup> Knott, p. 40.



acknowledge the sometimes uneasy nature of that 'overlap'. His approach is epitomised by his reading of Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, in which he argues that

Bunyan's condition at the end of the period described in *Grace Abounding* is one in which, in the language of his early tract *A Few Sighs from Hell* (1658), he has found "soul and Scripture...to embrace each other, and a sweet correspondency and agreement between them".<sup>24</sup>

As discussed in chapter six, it is a reading of *Grace Abounding* with which this study does not concur; *Grace Abounding* is notable for its refusal to depart from the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of saving reading in order to resolve the relationship between soul and scripture.

Knott glosses over the difficulties Calvinists had in establishing their relationship to the 'living Word'. Stuart Sim and John Stachniewski are among those who offer less complacent accounts, and who engage most extensively with the paradoxical dynamics of double predestination as being vital to our understanding of Calvinist texts. In *Negotiations with Paradox: Narrative Practice and Narrative Form in Bunyan and Defoe* (1990), Sim discusses "the way that the paradoxes associated with both Calvinism and spiritual autobiography shape narrative"<sup>25</sup> through an analysis of Bunyan and Defoe. He argues that Bunyan's "intense engagement with paradox", and "the absence of certainty that this involves", is "radically individuating against the grain of soteriology's predeterminism".<sup>26</sup> However, Sim confines his analysis to works of fiction, excluding autobiographical writing from detailed enquiry. This thesis differs not only in the range of texts examined, but in an interdisciplinary approach that focuses upon a particular community's problem of reading, rather than on textual criticism of a particular author.

John Stachniewski provides what remains, to date, the most exhaustive account of the impact of Calvinist anxiety upon seventeenth-century writing in *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (1991). This thesis is indebted to his work, which includes valuable chapters on Puritan despair, autobiographical narrative and *Grace Abounding*. His general purpose is to redress what he perceives as a tendency among critics to incline towards "an up-beat reading of the Protestant story", noting that "doubt of election is usually treated as an aberration of minor significance which in any case had more to do with the pathology of those afflicted with it than with the religious culture itself."<sup>27</sup> However, while his conclusions on

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<sup>24</sup> Knott, p. 137.

<sup>25</sup> Stuart Sim, *Negotiations with Paradox: Narrative Practice and Narrative Form in Bunyan and Defoe* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Sim, p. 106.

<sup>27</sup> Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 4, 3.



elect and reprobate ‘perceptual frames’ are of particular value<sup>28</sup>, he is primarily concerned to trace how Puritanism contributed to the construction of seventeenth-century subjectivities. The focus upon a particular subsection of the Puritan community, and its anxiety and arts of reading, distinguishes the present study from his approach.

Knott, Sim, and Stachniewski provide the most embracing studies of the impact of double predestination upon Puritan literature, and there are many more that take a tighter focus upon, for example, particular strands of Protestant hermeneutics.<sup>29</sup> However, (aside from contextual criticism of Bunyan<sup>30</sup>), the most specific contributions to our understanding of nonconformist practices of reading have been made by N.H. Keeble and Isabel Rivers.

In *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (1987), Keeble observes a burgeoning of Puritan literature at a time when Puritanism itself had become politically and religiously marginalised, and argues that “It was not Civil War, nor regicide, nor Cromwell which released the Puritan imagination, but nonconformity”.<sup>31</sup> Keeble gives a wide-ranging overview of the conditions that dictated the means and modes of literary production, focusing upon a context of marginalisation, persecution and censorship. His analysis includes a chapter on ‘internalization, introspection and individualism in nonconformist writing’, in which he briefly acknowledges the impact of ‘heart religion’ and self-examination upon the production of autobiographical writing. He observes that “Nonconformist writing was...private in an age which was going public”, and comments that “Introspection was necessary to establish sincerity precisely because it could only be confidently affirmed on the basis not of outward actions but of inward disposition and feelings”.<sup>32</sup> However, the scale of the task he sets himself means that he is unable to engage with the precise nature and ambivalence of ‘heart religion,’ and its consequences for autobiographical writing as a mode of reading salvation.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Stachniewski, *Persecutory Imagination*, pp. 127-168.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Thomas H. Luxon, *Literal Figures: Puritan Allegory and the Reformation Crisis in Representation* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and Anne Kibbey, *The Interpretation of Material Shapes in Puritanism: A Study of Rhetoric, Prejudice and Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> On contextual criticism on Bunyan, see introduction, footnote 54 below.

<sup>31</sup> N.H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), p. 24.

<sup>32</sup> Keeble, *Literary Culture*, pp. 211, 212.

<sup>33</sup> Keeble has, of course, written elsewhere on autobiographical writing – in particular in studies of Bunyan and Baxter. (See, for example, *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus*, ed. by N.H. Keeble (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) and N.H. Keeble, *Richard Baxter: Puritan Man of Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). The point is that in his assessment of the wider literary culture of nonconformity, he does not fully acknowledge the importance of the anxieties engendered by ‘heart-religion’, or their impact upon reading practice in relation to the Bible – the single most important text for nonconformists.



Unlike Keeble, Rivers hones in more tightly upon “the tension between languages of reason and grace” in *Reason, Grace and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780, Volume I, Whichcote to Wesley* (1991). However, her interest remains broader than this thesis, for she is less concerned about the strains *within* experimental Calvinist reading, as with the conflict between “the rise in the second half of the seventeenth century of Anglican moral religion and the reaction against it of movements which attempted in different ways to continue or return to the Reformation Protestant tradition.”<sup>34</sup> This wider shift, of course, has a formative impact upon experimental Calvinist reading, but Rivers devotes only one (albeit lengthy) chapter to the reaction of nonconformist thought to the new Anglican orthodoxy.<sup>35</sup> While it provides an important analysis, it is inevitably limited in ambition, concentrating upon a comparison between Bunyan and Baxter as representatives of “the two main opposed tendencies in nonconformity and yet who share much common ground.”<sup>36</sup> Rivers argues that “It is in their attitudes to the Bible that Baxter and Bunyan stand in sharpest contrast”, Baxter favouring human learning as an aid to understanding Scripture, and Bunyan insisting that the Bible is sufficient source of all his knowledge.<sup>37</sup> Nonetheless, she also stresses that both invested strongly in “the power of the preacher to transfix and transform his hearers through the combined weight of his own experience, divine assistance, and the spoken word”, and that their emphasis on the “interdependent roles of preacher and hearer is repeated in the relationship between writer and reader”, most notably in their works of practical piety.<sup>38</sup> However, while Rivers alerts us to the influence of a developing Anglican language of reason upon the nonconformist language of grace, she does not engage with the full spectrum of experimental Calvinist theology, or with the impact of anxiety over salvation upon their reading of the Word, nor with their life-writing as a response to both of these.

As previously stated, the critical industry across theological, historical and literary disciplines on seventeenth-century Puritanism is vast, and inevitably many works that contribute to our understanding of the field have not been cited here.<sup>39</sup> However, those mentioned above have the most immediate bearing upon experimental Calvinist models of reading, and the tension between them; they engage to different degrees with the anxiety generated by double predestination, and its impact upon attitudes towards language and literary production. This study contributes to, and

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<sup>34</sup> Rivers, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> Rivers, pp. 89-163.

<sup>36</sup> Rivers, p. 99.

<sup>37</sup> Rivers, p. 112. Baxter’s exceptionally heterodox position is discussed in the second chapter of this thesis: his leanings towards the importance of rational persuasion disqualify him from central consideration as a member of the experimental Calvinist community of readers, although the impact of his widely-read works of practical piety upon them is considered. See chapter two, p. 80, footnote 99, and pp. 80-84.

<sup>38</sup> Rivers, p. 115.

<sup>39</sup> For further discussion of the critical background on Puritan attitudes towards the Word, see chapter three, footnote 2, p. 91.

further, existing debates, but most importantly it argues that we must look again at our assumptions about the experimental Calvinist models of reading the Word, and at the role of autobiographical writing in that activity.

### Seventeenth-Century Autobiographical Writing: the Critical Context

Criticism on seventeenth-century autobiographical writing can be divided into three broad camps: full-length studies of the field; investigations which mention elements of life-writing as part of a wider literary or historical project; and works which focus on a seminal text, such as *Grace Abounding*. Also pertinent is an increasing body of theoretical work on life-writing.<sup>40</sup> Given that this study deals with three different autobiographical forms, it is necessary to address the theoretical issue of genre in relationship to life-writing first, before proceeding to an overview of studies with a particular seventeenth-century orientation.

In *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice*, Laura Marcus identifies

The fundamental problem of the instability or hybridity of autobiography as a genre...The proliferation of classificatory and categorising systems in autobiographical criticism testifies to the extent to which autobiography is seen as a problem which requires control and containment...For some recent literary critics and theorists who oppose the application of generic classifications to autobiography, the rejection of categorising systems can also stem from a perhaps exaggerated sense of autobiography's role in bridging traditional oppositions.<sup>41</sup>

In looking at diaries, conversion narratives and spiritual autobiography as the primary modes of experimental Calvinist life-writing, this thesis does not seek to gloss over the heterogeneity of the individual forms and the slippage between them, nor to deny the existence of other modes of life-writing;<sup>42</sup> its purpose is not to arrive at watertight generic definitions, but to reveal how the shifts in autobiographical strategies constitute a developing art of reading. However, in this respect it does

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<sup>40</sup> Among full-length studies, see, for example (in order of publication): Elizabeth Bruss, *Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a literary Genre* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976); Karl Joachim Weintraub, *The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); W.C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980); *Studies in Autobiography*, ed. James Olney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); John D. Barbour, *The Conscience of the Autobiographer: Ethical and Religious Dimensions of Autobiography* (London: Macmillan, 1992); John Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). See also the following volumes of periodicals devoted to the subject: *Genre*, 6. 1, 2 (1973); *Modern Language Notes*, 93.4 (1978); *Prose Studies*, 8.2 (1985); *Literature and History* 14.1 (1988).

<sup>41</sup> Laura Marcus, *Auto/biographical Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practise* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp. 7-8.

<sup>42</sup> Letters, for example, have been excluded from consideration, because their diversity places them beyond the range of this study.



contest Jerome Bruner's and Susan Weisser's argument that "it is the form or genre of the reflexive act involved in self-consciousness that matters, not the nature of the printout that ensues from it."<sup>43</sup> Diaries, conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies are indeed distinguished from one another by 'the nature of their printout', and those differences are fundamental to the role each plays in the attempt to secure saving reading.

There are, to date, only a handful of full-length studies of seventeenth-century autobiographical writing. Margaret Bottrall, in *Every Man a Phoenix: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Autobiography* (1958), by her own admission "aims only at indicating the various types of life-story" of the period (although she excludes diaries and conversion narratives from her field of study). She argues that there are two broad tendencies in seventeenth-century autobiographers, "introspective" and "extrovert"; Browne and Bunyan represent the former, Herbert and Halkett the latter, while Baxter is a combination of the two.<sup>44</sup> The book is more of a survey than a critique, and her approach elevates the 'integrity' and 'authenticity' of individual authors over the impact of social and theological constructs upon their narratives.

Like Bottrall, Paul Delany in *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (1969) confines himself to works "primarily written to give a coherent account of the author's life...composed after a period of reflection and forming a unified narrative"; he makes only a brief mention of diary-keeping as a precursor to spiritual autobiography.<sup>45</sup> He divides his material according to religious provenance, and stresses the public role of Puritan autobiography. His comment that "the godly man recounts his experiences for the encouragement and edification of his fellow-seekers after holiness" may be correct, but it tells only one side of the story; while he stresses the importance of "the bond between the autobiographer and his reader", he does not recognise the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading salvation, or the role spiritual autobiography plays in redressing it.<sup>46</sup>

In *Autobiography in Seventeenth-Century England: Theology and the Self* (1971), Dean Ebner engages more closely with the impact of Calvinist theology upon spiritual autobiography. Ebner identifies a Calvinist four-part structure of conversion and argues that this structure serves as a model for Baptist autobiographical narratives, which make use of antithetical syntax, mental

<sup>43</sup> Jerome Bruner and Susan Weisser, 'The Invention of Self: Autobiography and its forms', in *Literacy and Orality*, ed. by David R. Olson and Nancy Torrance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp.129-48, p. 137. For a related approach, see Paul de Man's 'Autobiography as De-facement', in which he argues that autobiography "is not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding". Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *Modern language Notes*, 94 (1979), 919-930 (p. 921).

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Bottrall, *Every Man a Phoenix: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Autobiography* (London: John Murray, 1958), pp. 4-5.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Delany, *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Delany, pp. 55, 56.



dialogue, and alternating Scripture verses.<sup>47</sup> However, he does not move beyond these observations to any more detailed analysis of their relationship with Scripture, or with the anxiety generated by double predestination.

Owen C. Watkins, in *The Puritan Experience* (1972), offers the most extensive account of Puritan autobiographical writing, one which encompasses diaries and conversion narratives as well as more extended autobiographies, and which relates the production of such texts to Puritan soteriology. Watkins structures his material according to sectarian provenance, concluding that narrative was “the most appropriate form in which to embody the emerging sense of the self” in the context of a theology in which “evidence [of salvation] consisted of particular phenomena and events made meaningful in a sequential pattern”.<sup>48</sup> This thesis also observes a blossoming of narrative forms of life-writing, from diary through conversion narrative to more extended autobiographies, but unlike *The Puritan Experience*, it relates this progression to a more specific theological context and to the tension between experience and interpretation engendered by it. Unlike Watkins, this investigation also pays close attention to the non-narrative dimensions of life-writing – in particular, the performative<sup>49</sup> power of inscription – as being key to our understanding of how these texts constituted a response to a fracture that was as much linguistic as theological.

Bottrall, Delany, Ebner have done much to stake out the territory of seventeenth-century autobiographical writing, while Watkins goes further than they in drawing out the impact of Puritanism upon its development. A developing engagement with seventeenth-century women’s autobiography also provides important insights into works previously neglected. *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth-Century Women*, edited by Elspeth Graham, Hilary Hinds, Elaine Hobby and Helen Wilcox (1989), presents a selection of such writings along with valuable contextual analyses, and there is a growing body of feminist criticism that addresses the importance of gender in autobiographical and other seventeenth-century texts by women.<sup>50</sup> This

<sup>47</sup> Dean Ebner, *Autobiography in Seventeenth-Century England: Theology and the Self* (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1971), pp. 48, 71.

<sup>48</sup> Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 238. On the transition from spiritual autobiography to narrative fiction, see G.A. Starr, *Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp. 3-73.

<sup>49</sup> The term ‘performative’ is used here, and throughout the thesis, to denote a linguistic act that enacts, rather than refers to, meaning. On performative language, and the difference between locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts, see J.L. Austin, *How to do things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, Sandra Findley and Elaine Hobby, ‘Seventeenth-Century Women’s Autobiography’, in *1642: Literature and Power in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. by Francis Barker, Jay Bernstein, John Coombes, Peter Hule, Jennifer Stone, and Jon Stratton (Colchester: University of Essex, 1981), pp. 11-36; Hilary Hinds, *God’s Englishwomen: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996); Elaine Hobby, *Virtue of Necessity: English Women’s Writing 1646-1688* (London: Virago, 1988); Cynthia S. Pomerleau, ‘The Emergence of Women’s Autobiography in England’, in *Women’s Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, ed. by Estelle C. Jelinek (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp. 21-38; Louise Stewart and Helen Wilcox, ‘“Why hath this Lady writ her own life?”: Studying Early Female Autobiography’, in *Teaching Women: Feminism and*



study considers the interaction between gender and the experimental Calvinist models of reading in chapter six, in relation to Jane Turner's spiritual autobiography, *Choice Experiences of the Kind Dealings of God before, in, and after Conversion*.<sup>51</sup>

Others have made significant contributions to our understanding of conversion narratives. Most notably, Patricia Caldwell traces the origins of conversion testimonies in *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (1983), though, as her title implies, her concern lies chiefly with American examples of the genre. Nigel Smith also gives a short but valuable critique of conversion narratives and embodied subjectivity in *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660*.<sup>52</sup> There is also a growing body of work that engages with diary from both theoretical and historical perspectives. Pertinent issues raised by such critiques are discussed in chapters four and five.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the above works, important contributions to our understanding of the relationship between experimental Calvinism and autobiography have been made by critics of Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*. Again, it is beyond the scope of this introduction to provide a full bibliographic survey of criticism generated by what has come to be regarded as the seminal spiritual autobiography of the period; chapter six engages with the critical debates where relevant. However, in the rush to locate *Grace Abounding* in the context of the culture from which it emerged,<sup>54</sup> critics have been too hasty

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*English Studies*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Helen Wilcox (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989). On criticism of women's diaries in particular, see, for example, *Inscribing the Daily: Critical Essays on Women's Diaries*, ed. by Suzanne L Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff (Amhurst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996). The following articles in that volume are of particular pertinence to seventeenth-century diary: Helen M. Buss, 'A Feminist Revision of New Historicism to Give Fuller Readings of Women's Private Writing', pp. 86-103; and Judy Simons, 'Invented Lives: Textuality and Power in Early Women's Diaries', pp. 252-263. See also Sara Heller Mendelson, 'Stuart Women's Diaries and Occasional Memoirs', in *Women in English Society 1500-1800*, ed. by Mary Prior (London, New York: Methuen, 1985), pp. 181-210.

<sup>51</sup> Jane Turner, *Choice Experiences of the Kind Dealings of God before, in, and after Conversion* (London: H. Hills, 1653).

<sup>52</sup> Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, pp. 33-45.

<sup>53</sup> There is room for more work to be done in this field. An early substantial study of Diary was offered by Robert A. Fothergill's *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974). Useful critiques of a general, theoretical nature include (in chronological order): Andrew Leonard Hassam, 'Style and Convention in the Diary: An Investigation with reference to the Reader', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University College, Cardiff, 1983); Elias Canetti, 'Dialogue with the Cruel Partner', in *The Conscience of Words*, trans. by Joachim Neugroschel (London: Andre Deutsch, 1986) pp. 40-54; Felicity A. Nussbaum, 'Toward Conceptualising Diary', in *Studies in Autobiography*, ed. James Olney (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.128-140; Roger Cardinal, 'Unlocking the Diary', in *Comparative Criticism 12: Representations of the Self*, ed. by E.S. Shaffer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.71-87; and Alex Aronson, *Studies In Twentieth-Century Diaries*, (Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1991). On feminist critiques of seventeenth-century diary, see footnote 50 above.

<sup>54</sup> On the recent flurry of publications in this area, see for example: N.H. Keeble, ed. *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus*, ed. by N.H. Keeble (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988); *Bunyan in our Time*, ed. by Robert G. Collmer (Kent, Ohio, London: Kent State University Press, 1989); *John Bunyan and his England, 1628-88*, ed. by Anne Laurence, W.R. Owens and Stuart Sim (London and Ronceverte: Hambledon Press, 1990); Richard Greaves, *John Bunyan and English Nonconformity* (London and Rio Grande: Hambledon Press, 1992). Among those who engage most directly with Bunyan's reading of the Bible see, for example: Dayton Haskin, 'Bunyan's Scriptural Acts', in *Bunyan in our Time*, ed. by Collmer, pp. 61-92; John R. Knott, Jr, 'Thou must live upon my Word: Bunyan and the Bible', in *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus*, ed. by Keeble, pp.153-169; and, most pertinent to the concerns of this thesis, Vincent Newey, ' "With the eyes of my understanding": Bunyan, Experience, and Acts of Interpretation, in *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus*, ed. by Keeble, pp.189-216.



in terming it “richly exemplary”<sup>55</sup> of sectarian autobiography in general. In fact, it is only by paying close and extended attention to the shifting forms of experimental Calvinist life-writing as a response by a community of readers to theological and linguistic crisis, that one is able to see how Bunyan’s text is not exemplary but exceptional.

All the above-mentioned works provide a broader context for the present thesis, which is substantially different in approach. Work on the ‘Puritan imagination’ has not adequately addressed the tensions between hermeneutical and experiential models of reading salvation. A failure to recognise the role played by experimental Calvinist life-writing in responding to this difficulty has been compounded by approaches which (with the exception of recent feminist criticism) rarely cross generic boundaries other than to identify conversion narratives as the less sophisticated precursors of spiritual autobiography, and which privilege *Grace Abounding* as a seminal text, excluding close analysis of its relatives. By contrast, this study gives equal weight to diaries, conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies, and argues that it is only by considering these forms in relation to one another that one can fully discern their role as a response to the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading. Furthermore, the enquiry engages not only with the narrative aspects of life-writing, but also with the shifts in their modes of their inscription, and their implications for a model of reading salvation that privileged the performative Word above the dead Letter.

### Thesis Outline

The first chapter examines the nature of the anxiety generated by the theology of double predestination, and the second looks at how the context of experimental Calvinism brought about further shifts in theological and ecclesiological emphasis. The third, pivotal chapter examines how the trauma of experimental Calvinist uncertainty over salvation was reflected in their reading of the Word. The final three chapters discuss how diaries, conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies constitute a developing art of reading that sought to resolve despair through strategies of inscription.

Chapter one, “‘Uncomfortable Calvinists’: The Reformed Theology of Double Predestination and the Anxiety of Discerning Salvation”, considers the essential dynamics of the Calvinist theology of double predestination as established during the sixteenth century, which were formative of later experimental Calvinism. It surveys the wider theological background, and focuses in detail upon two of its most important and influential articulations: Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion*, and

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<sup>55</sup> Stachniewski, ‘Introduction’, *Grace Abounding*, p.ix.



William Perkins' *A Golden Chaine*.<sup>56</sup> It argues that double predestination produced not only a crippling anxiety over salvation, but also a concern over how one might *know* that one was saved. That distress was generated by a theology which insisted on absolutes yet was founded upon paradox, and which was compounded by Ramist binarism. Such internal pressures spawned the consoling doctrine of preparation, and a progressive structure of conversion through the 'Ordo Salutis', but these sat uncomfortably within a framework of predestination. Similarly, the doctrine of perseverance was undermined by that of 'ineffectual calling', and the prospect that one's faith might be merely temporary. The desire for more active participation in one's predestination, and the need to secure both the presence, and the permanence, of assurance, were to remain urgent for later experimental Calvinists, and to shape their attitudes towards reading and inscription.

Chapter two, "'Invisible Saints': Experimental Calvinism and the Anxiety of Discerning Salvation" briefly considers how the concerns of reformed theology were further heightened by events during the first half of the seventeenth century, and in particular by the two-way pulls of Arminianism and Antinomianism. It then looks in detail at the theological and ecclesiological context of experimental Calvinism: the emergence of Presbyterianism and of the separatist gathered churches. It examines both the differences, and the common ground, in Presbyterian and Independent structures for redressing anxiety over election, and concludes with an analysis of some of the most popular works of practical piety through which the theology of double predestination was most widely mediated across the experimental Calvinist 'community of readers': the Independent Theophilus Gale's *The Anatomie of Infidelitie* (1672); Richard Baxter's prolific output including *The Saint's Everlasting Rest* (1649), *The Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience, and Spiritual Comfort* (1653), *A Call to the Unconverted* (1658), *Directions and Persuasions to a Sound Conversion* (1658), and *Directions for Weak Distempered Christians* (1669); and the Presbyterian Joseph Alleine's *An Alarme to Unconverted Sinners* (posthumously published in 1671).<sup>57</sup> Such works encouraged their readers to prepare for conversion and assurance through diligent reading of the Bible, and dismissed any residual objections to the validity of a concept of preparation within a scheme of predestination.

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<sup>56</sup> Calvin's *Institutes* were first published in 1535; the first English edition appeared in 1561 as Jean Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, trans. by T.N. [Thomas Norton] (London: Reinolde Wolfe and Richard Harrison, 1561). [Hereafter referred to as *Institutes*.] Perkins' *Armilla Aurea* was first published in 1590, and translated in 1591 as William Perkins, *A Golden Chaine or The description of Theologie, containing the order of the causes of Salvation and Damnation, according to God's Word*, trans. by 'an other' (London: Edward Alde, 1591). [*A Golden Chaine* was subsequently revised and enlarged in both Latin and English editions. All other references are to the 1591 edition unless otherwise stated.]

<sup>57</sup> Theophilus Gale, *The Anatomie of Infidelitie, or, An explication of the Nature, Causes, Aggravations, and Punishment of Unbelief* (London: Giles Widdows, 1672); Richard Baxter, *The Saint's Everlasting Rest* (London: Thomas Underhil and Francis Tyton, 1650 [the separate title pages of pts 2,3,4, are each dated 1649]); *The Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience, and Spiritual Comfort* (London: Tho. Underhil, 1653); *A Call to the Unconverted* (Kidderminster: N. Simmons, 1658); *Directions and Persuasions to a Sound Conversion*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn (London: John Dunston, 1683 [1<sup>st</sup> edn 1658]); *Directions for Weak Distempered Christians* (London: N. Simmons, 1669); *The Christian Directory* (London: N. Simmons, 1673); Joseph Alleine, *An Alarme to Unconverted Sinners*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Nevil Simmons, 1673 [1<sup>st</sup> edn 1672]).



However, that buried contradiction was to resurface in ambivalence over the agency of the reader in the experimental Calvinist relationship to the Word.

Chapter three, “‘Reading the Word’: The Experimental Calvinist Anxiety of Reading Salvation”, investigates the impact of the theology of double predestination upon experimental Calvinist reading of the Bible. It finds that while this community of readers ostensibly championed an integration of Word and word, Spirit and Letter, their reading, like their theology, was binary in nature; it bifurcated into hermeneutical and experiential models, and privileged the latter. Issues about the interpretation of Scripture fuelled existing unease over evidence, signification and the Letter, while the doctrine of ‘autopistos’ (which held that Scripture was self-authenticating), and the practice of collation, bespoke an ambivalence towards the reader rooted in the paradox of preparation and predestination. An ideal of saving reading as an experiential union that subsumed reader and Word into Spirit provided an alternative. The removal of the reader’s autonomy was both liberating and disempowering, and a source of continued anxiety. Furthermore, while saving reading was identified with oral manifestations of the Word, and voice (spoken or inner) was supposed to figure presence, it was also a mode of disappearance. The temporality of experiential encounters with the Spirit meant that retrospection could call their validity into question; they invited a hermeneutical re-reading of assurance that did not confirm but confuse.

Experimental Calvinists were forced to return to the written word, and to experiment with different forms of life-writing in order to convert their reading, and thereby themselves. The Puritan tradition of diary-keeping is found to be the form preferred by Presbyterian writers (to date no diaries written by Congregationalists or Particular Baptists are known to have survived from this period), while the Independent ecclesiology, based upon concepts of separation and fellowship, gave rise to the conversion narrative. Both Presbyterians and Independents wrote more extended spiritual autobiographies. The forms developed chronologically, with some degree of overlap: Puritan diaries emerged alongside the doctrine of preparation at the end of the Sixteenth Century; oral conversion testimonies originated with the growth of the gathered churches in the 1640s, and collections of them were published primarily in the early 1650s; and spiritual autobiographies flourished from the 1650s onwards.<sup>54</sup> The final three chapters identify the features of each genre, and discuss how, in different ways, each fostered strategies of inscription by which to attempt to satisfy the desire that grace communicated through the Word should be both present and permanent. Together, they constitute a developing art of reading salvation.



Chapter four, “‘That I may tie myself under mine own handwriting’: Diary and the Experimental Calvinist Anxiety of Reading Salvation”, examines how Presbyterian diarists negotiated the fraught relationship between assurance, experiential reading and hermeneutic re-reading. Puritans had long been advocates of the duty of self-examination through the writing and perusal of a diary, and Presbyterians were continuing a tradition which provided a structure for the re-reading of experience. Five experimental Calvinist diaries of the period are known to survive in their original holograph form, four of which are preoccupied with negotiating a saving relationship with the Word: those of Owen Stockton, Oliver Heywood, Eleanor Stockton, and Isaac Archer.<sup>59</sup> Owen Stockton used his text as a defence against anxiety through the reiteration of Word-given assurance; Heywood was more ambitious in attempting to redress the temporality of assurance, exploiting the performative holographic properties of his text in order to capture both its presence and its permanence. However, while these two diaries laid claim to a degree of spiritual security, they remained founded upon the contradiction of preparation within predestination. Seeking to uphold the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of passive experiential saving reading, they retreated from acknowledging the role played by human agency in negotiating experience, or the tensions implicit in their enterprise. By contrast, Eleanor Stockton and Isaac Archer were less able to conceal the strained relationship between experiential and hermeneutic reading in their interaction with the Word, and their texts foundered in the attempt to write themselves into saving reading. In the process, the very use and purpose of diary-writing was called into question. Considered together, these four diaries represent the imperfect beginnings of an art of writing saving reading, an art that was to be further developed in conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies.

Chapter five, “‘What I was, what I am, and what I shall be’: Conversion Narrative and the Experimental Calvinist Anxiety of Reading Salvation”, investigates how the members of Independent churches sought to capture both the presence and permanence of assurance through the conversion narrative. The narratives originated as oral deliveries of testimonies of conversion by the Word before congregation members, whose approval would secure entry into an ‘embodied’, gathered church. Oral testimonies, and their approval by a congregation of ‘visible saints’, not only provided a substitute clarity for those uncertain over their election; they were performative enactments of conversion. The nature of such events (along with the critical problematics of retrieving them) are discussed through an examination of church books of the period. Consideration is given to the ways in which they both aspired to, and retreated from, a performative re-enactment

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<sup>58</sup> The first notable precursor was Richard Norwood’s autobiography written in 1639. Richard Norwood, *The Journal of Richard Norwood* (New York: Scholars Facsimiles and Reprints, 1945).

<sup>59</sup> Owen Stockton, *Diary*, Dr Williams’s Library, MS 24.7; Oliver Heywood, *Papers*, British Library, Additional MSS 45,963–45,981; Eleanor Stockton, *Diary*, Dr Williams’s Library, MS 24.8; Isaac Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge University Library, Additional MS 8499.



of grace that was potentially blasphemous. Such an empowering adaptation of the experiential model of saving reading could not readily be accommodated within the strictures of Calvinist theology, and in their printed form the testimonies renounced such ambitions. The chapter considers three published collections of narratives in this light: *Spirituell Experiences of Sundry Beleevers* (1653), edited by Henry Walker; *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh* (1653), edited by John Rogers; and *Roses from Sharon or Sweet Experiences* (1654), edited by Samuel Petto.<sup>60</sup> The publication of these testimonies severed them from their oral performative roots, and delivered them into a new relationship with both their speakers / authors and their readers. However, their origins in spoken delivery continued to shape their formulaic structure, which showed a simple progression from legal to saving reading. An account of the testifier's experience of the Word was followed by a single section of retrospection (and, in the case of *Spirituell Experiences*, a list of 'demonstrations' of assurance.) The concern to evoke the presence of grace (prevalent among experimental Calvinist diarists such as Heywood) began to shift towards to a greater preoccupation with permanence, and this was explored through an engagement with the materiality of the Letter as a "mark" or "token" of assurance. However, the attempt met with limited success, and instead the published testimonies began to look again at the potential for narrative to resolve tensions in the reading of salvation. That movement away from performative inscription, towards a more sophisticated (and disembodied) manipulation of narrative in the quest to secure saving reading, was to be continued through the medium of spiritual autobiography.

Chapter six, "'Living Monuments': Spiritual Autobiography and the Experimental Calvinist Anxiety of Reading Salvation", considers how both Presbyterians and Independents continued the development of an art of reading salvation through spiritual autobiography. The chapter begins by identifying works written by experimental Calvinists in the context of the wealth of such publications produced in the second half of the seventeenth century. It goes on to examine key features of the corpus in relation to the anxiety of reading salvation, before proceeding to a more detailed reading of three representative texts: Jane Turner's *Choice Experiences of the Kind Dealings of God before, in, and after Conversion* (1653); Joseph Barrett's 'God's Early Dealings with Mr Barrett' (completed in 1684, and published posthumously in 1699); and John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (first edition published in 1666.)<sup>61</sup> Such works could only alleviate anxiety over salvation through an assertion of hermeneutic agency at odds with experimental

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<sup>60</sup> Henry Walker, *Spirituell Experiences of Sundry Beleevers* (London: Robert Ibbitson, 1652); John Rogers, *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh: A Tabernacle for the Sun or Irenicum Evagelicum An Idea of Church Discipline* (London: R.I. and G. and H., 1653); Samuel Petto, 'Roses from Sharon or Sweet Experiences', in *The Voice of the Spirit* (London: Livewell Chapman, 1654). It appears that only three collections of conversion narratives were published during the period, all in the 1650s; thereafter testimonies were published individually. See chapter five, p. 142, footnote 3.

Calvinist orthodoxy, which, while it acknowledged the Letter, privileged the Spirit. The tensions generated by this conflict were negotiated through a manipulation of the authorial role, and through narrative structures that allowed the re-integration of interpretation as a necessary and, indeed, dominant part of saving reading. The autobiographies of Turner and Barrett provide examples of the range of strategies by which this was achieved by both Independents and Presbyterians across the period. Against this background, Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* emerges as typical in its concern to resolve a fraught relationship with the Word, but exceptional in its ultimate refusal to depart from the orthodoxy of saving reading in the process of so doing. Spiritual autobiography in general represents the culmination of a developing art of reading among the experimental Calvinist community of readers, but *Grace Abounding* remains as a testament to the enduring perplexity that dogged experimental Calvinist attempts to read salvation. The roots of that perplexity lay in the reformed theology of double predestination, and are considered in the next chapter.

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<sup>61</sup> Jane Turner, *Choice Experiences*; 'J.W', *A Funeral Sermon upon the death of Mr. Joseph Barrett...to which is added, An Account of his Holy Life*, (London: Tho. Parkhurst, 1699); *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (London: George Larkin, 1666).



## Chapter One

### 'Uncomfortable Calvinists': The Reformed Theology of Double Predestination and the Anxiety of Discerning Salvation

#### Introduction

This chapter considers the development of the theology of double predestination in English reformed theology up until the end of the sixteenth century as the legacy left to the experimental Calvinism that emerged after that date. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the decree of reprobation underwent shifts in emphasis and acceptance, and spawned additional doctrines intended to ameliorate the doubt of election it engendered. Those responses in turn often created new tensions. Such debates shaped the anxiety of reading salvation that informed and occasioned experimental Calvinist autobiographical writing, and neither can be properly understood without tracing their theological origins. Experimental Calvinists frequently identified themselves with earlier reformed theology in distinction against the 'deviant' restored church. There were some important shifts in emphasis, but nonetheless the essential doctrinal elements of double predestination were forged in the sixteenth century. The length of this tradition means that it is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide anything other than a brief overview of the *history* of Calvinism. More important is a detailed analysis of the *dynamics* of double predestination: the anxieties and instabilities it produced, and the theological strategies devised for redressing them. The theological tactics devised for alleviating anxiety over election were to be reflected in experimental Calvinist negotiations with the Word as a source of salvation. In order to begin to understand that relationship, this and the following chapter examine the 'pressure points' of the theology of double predestination, the nature of Calvinist anxiety, and attempts to resist and negotiate its inherent difficulties. The theological development of double predestination in England can be considered in terms of three main periods. The first is its growth throughout the sixteenth century culminating in its position as the central theology of the Church of England and its theological expression in the work of William Perkins (the concern of this chapter). The second spans its entanglements with Arminianism and Antinomianism between 1600 and 1650; and the third, the development of experimental Calvinism, pre- and post- Restoration, until the Toleration Act in 1689 (these two periods are addressed in the following chapter). Throughout both chapters, the focus of enquiry remains the anxiety over salvation produced by the doctrine of double predestination, and the endeavour to suppress or redress it.

## Sixteenth-Century Reformed Theology: The Historical Context

The doctrine of double predestination is often considered synonymous with Calvinism, and indeed most who subscribed to it regarded themselves as ‘Calvinists’. However the term is misleading, for it is used in relation to a large number of theologians, many of whom differ from Calvin on certain points and approaches, and also from one another.<sup>1</sup> It is necessary to consider the major figures and factors that contributed to the adoption of the theology of double predestination throughout the sixteenth century in order to contextualise a more detailed analysis of the contributions of two of its exponents most influential upon experimental Calvinism, Jean Calvin and William Perkins.

The English theology of double predestination grew out of a tradition of indigenous Augustinian theology that existed prior to the Reformation, which was to meet with the influence of continental reformers. William Tyndale, John Frith, Robert Barnes, George Joye, Miles Coverdale and Simon Fish were among those who focused on faith and justification as gifts of grace, and who also shared an emphasis on the centrality of sanctification (or good works). Augustine remained seminal to the theology of double predestination throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; there were numerous Latin editions of his *The City of God* (selections from it were published in English in 1608, and a full English edition, translated by John Healy, in 1610.) In Book 15 Chapter I of *The City of God*, (a passage cited by Perkins in his *Golden Chaine*<sup>2</sup>), Augustine had asserted that mankind

is divided into two sorts: such as live according to man, and such as live according to God. These, we mystically call, *two cities* or societies, the one predestinate to reign eternally with God: the other condemned to perpetuall torment with the devil.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike some of those who followed him, Augustine did not balk at the implications of double predestination for the reprobate, but instead dwelt at length on the eternal severity of their torment. Among the issues he discussed were “whether a fleshly body may possibly endure eternal paine” (answer, ‘yes’); and “Of Hell, and the qualitie of the eternal paines therein”. He argued against those who claimed that “the torments after the judgement, shal be but the meanes whereby the soule shal be punished”, and that “hell’s paines should not be eternal”. Those who promised “impunity to their

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<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, Calvin is in a very real sense the ‘spiritual forefather’ of the autobiographers with whom we are concerned: as discussed later in this chapter, the *Institutes of Christian Religion*, more than any other work of Reformed Theology, wrestles with the problem of anxiety over election.

<sup>2</sup> Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, sig. T2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Augustine, *The Citie of God*, trans. by J.H. (London: George Eld, 1610), p. 553. See also Augustine, *A Worke of the Predestination of Saints*, trans. by Nycolas Lesse (London: Walter Lynne, 1550).



own bad lives withall, by pretending a general mercy of God unto the whole generation of men” received particular condemnation, and Augustine warned that

They that desire to escape their paine eternall, must cease to argue against God, and raise his yoake upon them while they have time. For what a fondnesse were it to value the pains eternall by a fire only of a long continuance, but yet to believe assuredly that life eternall hath no end at all.<sup>4</sup>

Augustine’s theology grew out of a preoccupation with the omnipotence of God and the correlative weakness of the human will.<sup>5</sup> Given the corrupt nature of humanity, the wonder was less that some should be condemned, but rather, that some should be saved; it seemed that God’s grace was made all the more bountiful and precious by the possibility of His wrath.

The idea of predestination derived from St. Paul (Augustine recorded in his *Confessions* how he “laid hold... upon the Apostle Paul above all the rest”<sup>6</sup>), and in particular from the following verses of the Epistle to the Romans:

For those which he knewe before, he also predestinate to be made like to the image of his Sonne, that he might be the first borne among manie brethren.  
Moreover whome he predestinate, them also he called, and whome he called, them also he justified, and whome he justified, them he also glorified.  
Romans 8.29,30.

So then it is not in him that willeth, nor in him that runeth, but in God that sheweth mercie...  
Therefore he hathe mercie on whome he wil, and whome he wil, he hardeneth.  
Romans 9.16,18.

Also Esaias cryeth concerning Israel, though the number of the children of Israel were as the sand of the sea, yet shal but a remnant be saved.  
For he will make his account, & gather it into a short sume with righteousnes: for the Lord will make a short count in the earth.  
Romans 9.27,28.<sup>7</sup>

Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith alone – the “rallying cry” of the Reformation<sup>8</sup> - was also indebted to St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans, which he considered “alone ought to be accounted the

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<sup>4</sup> Augustine, *Citie of God*, pp. 836, 861.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Augustine, *Citie of God*, p.213, 379, 424.

<sup>6</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by William Watts (London: Abel Roper, 1650), p. 216.

<sup>7</sup> *Geneva Bible*, fols 73<sup>r</sup>, 73<sup>v</sup>. [

<sup>8</sup> John Carroll, *Guilt: The Grey Eminence behind Character, History and Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 101.

Index and Methode of all the Scriptures.”<sup>9</sup> The important verses were 1.17: “The juste shal live by faith” and 11.5-6: “And if it be of grace, it is no more of workes: or els were grace no more grace: but if it be of workes, it is no more grace: or els were worke no more worke”.<sup>10</sup>

The nature of saving faith was particularly subject to scrutiny, and was closely related to an ability to read the Word correctly. Luther condemned those whose understanding of faith was based on a misreading of the gospel:

Fayth is not a certain cold opinion or a wandring cogitation of a mans mynde, suche a one as any man (hearing the historye of the Gospell) may foolishly imagin hym selfe to have... a true fayth is the worke of God whereby we are regenerate and borne anew by his Spirit... fayth is... an effectuall, lyvely, quicke and myghty operation in our harte.<sup>11</sup>

The very insistence on faith as a criterion of salvation served to undermine it, for it encouraged a close interrogation of one’s belief alongside the ever-present possibility that it might be mere ‘fabrication’. Luther’s intolerance of any doubts or waverings furthered such unease. An adherence to the fundamental concept of the oneness or unity of truth led him to state uncompromisingly that “everything is to be believed or nothing is to be believed”<sup>12</sup>:

Faith consists of something indivisible: it is either a whole faith and believes all there is to believe, or it is no faith at all if it does not believe one part of what there is to believe...<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore:

It is as with a ring; if it has only one defect, it can no longer be used. And if a bell cracks in only one place it does not sound any longer and is useless.<sup>14</sup>

The perfection of faith might well have seemed unattainable, but Luther provided a pressure-valve for such anxiety in his concept of ‘anfectung’<sup>15</sup> – an abject terror over salvation that often preceded

<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, *A Methodicall Preface prefixed before the Epistle of S. Paule to the Romanes*, trans. by W.W. (London: Thomas Woodcocke, [1590?]), sig. Aiv<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Romans 1.17; 11.5-6, *Geneva Bible*, fols 70<sup>v</sup>, 74<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> Luther, *A Methodicall Preface*, sigs Bi<sup>v</sup> – Bii<sup>v</sup>. On Luther’s ideas about the reading of Scripture, see A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word: Martin Luther: Doctor of Sacred Scripture* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1969).

<sup>12</sup> ‘Kurzes Bekenntniss vom Heiligen Sacramente’, in *D. Martin Luther’s Werke, kritische Gesamtausgabe*, ed. J.F.K. Knaake and others, 57 vols (Weimar: Hermann Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1883-) LIV, 158, translated by and cited in Skevington Wood, p. 145. [Hereafter referred to as *D. Martin Luther’s Werke*.]

<sup>13</sup> Martin Luther, ‘Lectures on Romans’, trans. and ed. by Wilhelm Pauck, in *Library of Christian Classics*, ed. John T. McNeill and Henry P. van Dusen (London: S.C.M. Press ltd., 1953) XV, 102.

<sup>14</sup> Luther, ‘Kurzes Bekenntniss vom Heiligen Sacramente’, in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, LIV. 158, trans. by and cited in Skevington Wood, p.150.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, ‘Theses For the Heidelberg Disputation’, trans. by Karlfried Froehlich, in *Martin Luther: Selections from his Writings*, ed. John Dillenburger (New York: Anchor Books, 1961), p. 502.



the very moment of conversion. 'Anfechtung' provided a means whereby doubt of election could be contained, and ameliorated, within a narrative sequence that promised release.

Luther's rigor in defining a true saving faith was accompanied by a stress on the impotence of the human will, argued most notably in the conflict with Erasmus that culminated in the publication of *The Bondage of the Will* in 1520. In it he asserted that

The power of 'free-will' is nil, and it does no good, nor can do, without grace... [man] has no 'free-will', but is a captive, prisoner and bonds slave, either to the will of God, or to the will of Satan.<sup>16</sup>

Like Augustine before him, Luther was concerned to preserve the omnipotence of his God, whose will could not be "resisted, altered or impeded"<sup>17</sup>, and the beneficence of his grace, and his theology encouraged both introspection and a sense of one's own passivity. Most significantly in this respect, *The Bondage of the Will* departed from Luther's customary emphasis on salvation, and seemed to acknowledge the dual nature of predestination, discussing at length God's method of hardening and of working evil in man.<sup>18</sup> However, Luther could not conceal his unease with double predestination, and his text could not help but dissent from itself:

It remains absurd to reason's judgement that God, Who is just and good, should require of 'free-will' impossibilities... and that, by not giving the Spirit, He should act so severely and mercilessly as to harden, or allow to be hardened. Reason will insist that these are not the acts of a good and merciful God.<sup>19</sup>

Luther soon retreated from the severity of the position he had articulated in *The Bondage of the Will*, and by 1576 the Lutheran Formula of Concord officially rejected any decree of reprobation and declared that God willed the salvation of all men.<sup>20</sup> However, Luther's radical assertion of 'justification by faith alone', and his incautious formulation of double predestination in *The Bondage of the Will* mark the foundation of reformed theology. Alongside these, his doctrine of 'Sola Scriptura', which stressed the paramount importance of the individual's relationship with the Word, remained central to subsequent developments and was to be of fundamental importance to the experimental Calvinist models of reading the Word.<sup>21</sup> *The Bondage of the Will* remained an important influence on figures such as Bucer, Martyr and Calvin, who were more ready to make

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<sup>16</sup> Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. by J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston (London: James Clarke, 1957), pp. 105, 107.

<sup>17</sup> Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, p.84.

<sup>18</sup> Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, pp. 203-207.

<sup>19</sup> Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, p. 201.

<sup>20</sup> Dewey D. Wallace, Jr, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525-1695* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), p. 34.

<sup>21</sup> See chapter three, p. 92.

explicit its austere implications.<sup>22</sup> (Other works, such as the commentary on Galatians, were to be important to figures as diverse as the Antinomian John Eaton, and John Bunyan.<sup>23</sup>) Most significant for the present study, however, is the observation that even in its earliest formations the doctrine of double predestination was accompanied by anxiety and textual fissure.

Under the rule of Edward the suppression of Reformation doctrine was lifted. The already influential Martin Bucer was granted the Regius Professorship of Divinity and Cambridge, and Peter Martyr was made Professor of Divinity at Oxford. Bucer and Martyr related predestination, justification and sanctification (or 'good works and conversation') to an 'Ordo Salutis' or 'order of salvation' that was a series of spiritual steps, consequent upon predestination, leading to calling, justification, sanctification and, eventually, glorification.<sup>24</sup> (William Perkins was later to elaborate upon the doctrine, and it will be discussed in more detail in that context.)

It is likely that in the Forty-Two Articles of 1553 (the basis of the later Thirty-Nine Articles), Article Seventeen derived from Peter Martyr's definition of predestination.<sup>25</sup> The article stated:

Predestination to life, is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby (before the foundations of the world were laid) He hath constantly decreed by His own judgement secret to us, to deliver from curse, and damnation those whom he hath chosen out of mankind, and to bring them to everlasting salvation by Christ... whereupon such as have so excellent a benefit of God given unto them be called, according to God's purpose, by His Spirit working in due season, they through grace obey the calling, they be justified freely, they be made sons by adoption, they be made like the image of God's only begotten Son Jesus Christ, they walk religiously in good works, and at length by God's mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.<sup>26</sup>

The Ordo Salutis was reiterated in the accompanying catechism drawn up by John Ponet, Bishop of Winchester.<sup>27</sup> Article Seventeen's statement that God's decree had been made 'before the foundations of the world were laid' made even more distant any causal connection between sin and reprobation, for it now anteceded the fall of man. The difficulty Luther had had in reconciling himself to an unjust God would have been exacerbated still further by this 'supralapsarian' position.

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<sup>22</sup> See Wallace, p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> John Eaton, *The Honey-combe of Free Justification by Christ Alone* (London: R.B. , 1642); Bunyan, *Grace Abounding* p. 34.

<sup>24</sup> See W.P. Stephens, *The Holy Spirit in the Theology of Martin Bucer* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), pp.21-28, 38, 40; and Joseph C. McLelland, 'The Reformed Doctrine of Predestination according to Peter Martyr', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 8 (1955), 255-271, (pp. 261, 267).

<sup>25</sup> John P. Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's Doctrine of Man and Grace* (Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1976), p. 187.

<sup>26</sup> *The Text of the Thirty-Nine Articles of 1553, 1563, 1571 Interleaved*, preface by W.M. Meredith (London: Rivingtons, 1889), p. 22. [Hereafter referred to as *Thirty Nine Articles*.]

<sup>27</sup> John Ponet, *A Short Catechisme, or Playne Instruction* (London: 1553), pp. xxxvii-xxxix, xliii.



However, unlike Luther, Article Seventeen pressed harder in its attempt to expound the obscure justice and reason that underlay double predestination. It argued that “godly consideration of predestination...is full of sweet, pleasant and unspeakable comfort to godly persons” and that, conversely,

For curious and carnal persons lacking the spirit of Christ, to have continually before their eyes the sentence of God’s predestination, is a most dangerous downfall whereby the Devil may thrust either into desperation, or into a recklessness of most unclean living, no less perilous than desperation.<sup>28</sup>

The Article reveals further ambivalence in responses to double predestination and its dissemination. Works were irrelevant yet might be cited as evidence of election; behaviour could not alter God’s decree, yet the threat of reprobation had a moral utility, deepening the sinful despair of the unchosen. The added insistence, in line with Augustine, that the pains of the sinful were eternal, and that there would be no eventual salvation for the sinner, might be expected to fray the nerves of the weak believer still further. Furthermore, if one failed to derive ‘sweet comfort’ from the doctrine of double predestination, that was in itself a further sign that one was not among the elect. As with the insistence on faith alone, the double imperative undermined the very thing it was intended to shore up.

Article Seventeen of the Forty-Two Articles dismissed anxiety as belonging to the ungodly, but pastoral writers at the time were less complacent. For example, Bishop John Hooper in his *Declaration of the Ten Commandments* warned his readers that desperation distracted from God’s mercy and recommended consoling scriptures that would build up faith.<sup>29</sup> That men like Hooper felt the need to write works such as these suggests that, in their role as pastors, they were encountering considerable anxieties amongst their flock.

The Marian years saw persecution for Protestants, and the exile of some to Zurich and Geneva. Their subsequent return under Elizabeth was to further the impact of continental reform upon English theology. Exiles to Zurich came under the influence of Heinrich Bullinger who was himself influenced by Huldreich Zwingli. Bullinger’s work *Sermonum Decades* was published in English in 1577, 1584 and 1587, and became a manual for Elizabethan clergy and a textbook for theology at Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>30</sup> Exiles to Geneva came into contact with the work of Jean Calvin and his

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<sup>28</sup> *Thirty-Nine Articles*, pp. 22, 23.

<sup>29</sup> John Hooper, *Writings of Hooper*, ed. by Samuel Carr and Charles Nevins, 2 vols, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1843, 1852), pp. 422.

<sup>30</sup> Heinrich Bullinger, *Sermonum Decades*, trans by H.I (London: Ralphe Newberrie, 1577; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1584; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 1587). Gail Clark Ritchie Henson, ‘A Holy Desperation: The Literary Quest for Grace in the Reformed English Tradition from John Bale to John Bunyan’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Louisville, 1981), p. 20.



younger ‘successor’, Theodore Beza. In addition to the seminal influence of Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion* a number of other significant works emerged from exiles in Geneva. William Whittingham translated Beza’s *A Briefe Declaration of the Chiefe Poynts of Christian Religion* (which became better known in a later translation by John Stockwood as *The Treasure of Truth* in 1576). Beza’s doctrine of ‘ineffectual calling’ – the idea that one might exhibit all the signs of the elect without truly being so – gave more fuel to existent introspection and despair.<sup>31</sup> (Again, it finds its most influential expression in the work of William Perkins, and will be considered in that context.) Scory translated a work by Augustine on Predestination in c.1556, and John Knox wrote a treatise on the same subject, probably in 1558. However, the most significant text to emerge from Geneva during this period was the Geneva Bible in 1560.<sup>32</sup> It became the main translation used by puritans throughout this and the next century, and its marginal annotations reinforced the doctrine of double predestination. For example, the summary of the argument that precedes Paul’s Epistle to the Romans provides the following unequivocal gloss: “he electeth some to be saved, and of his juste judgement rejecteth others to be damned.”<sup>33</sup> The primacy of the individual’s relationship with Scripture did not preclude a little careful guidance. The Geneva Bible was the main vehicle for the dissemination of Calvinism among lay readers or, indirectly through preachers, upon illiterate but attentive churchgoers.

The Elizabethan church settlement saw the return of the exiles and the enshrinement of double predestination as the official teaching of the Church of England in the Thirty-Nine Articles. A century later Bunyan was to allude to certain of the articles as a measure of Calvinist orthodoxy.<sup>34</sup> The Thirty-Nine Articles were based on the original Forty-two of 1553; revised in 1563, they were given additional authorisation in 1571. Article Nine on Freewill in the 1553 version was expanded as Article Ten in 1571, but in both the message remained that man had no free will to do good “without the grace of God preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.” Article Eleven on the ‘Justification of Man’ was slightly expanded in 1571, and more importantly, Article Twelve was added, which articulated the principle of sanctification. It stated that good works were “the fruits of faith, and follow after justification” and “cannot put away our sins or endure the severity of God’s judgement” but also acknowledged that they were “pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ”. Most significantly from the point of view of the weak believer, they were a means whereby true saving faith might be recognised: “by them a lively faith may be as

<sup>31</sup> Theodore Beza, *The Treasure of Trueth*, trans. by John Stockwood (London: Thomas Woodcocke, 1576), sigs D1<sup>r</sup>- D3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Augustine, *Two bokes of the noble doctor and B.S. Augustine thone entitleled of the Predestinacion of saintes, thother of perseverance unto thende*, trans. John Scory [Geneva? n.pub., 1556?]. See Wallace, p.205-6, footnote 141, for his argument on the place and date of possible publication. John Knox, *An Answer to a Great Number [sic] of blasphemous cavillations written by an Anabaptist, and Adversarie to Gods eternal Predestination* (Geneva: John Crespin, 1560).

<sup>33</sup> *Geneva Bible*, fol 70<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> John Bunyan, *A Defense of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith in Jesus Christ* (London: Francis Smith, 1672), p. 113.



evidently known, as a tree discerned by the fruit.”<sup>35</sup> However, Article Thirteen (formerly Twelve in the Forty-two Articles) went on to state that “works done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of the spirit are not pleasant to God” and moreover, that “we doubt not, but they have the nature of sin.”<sup>36</sup> Good works might not be a sign of sanctification after all. The uncertainties generated by this equivocation were to flare up in the Antinomian controversies of the next century, and the troubled relationship between works and grace was to be a major factor in the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading.

Article Seventeen ‘Of Predestination and Election’ remained essentially unchanged from the 1553 version,<sup>37</sup> but the original Forty-Second Article which asserted that “all men shall not be saved” was dropped. It was of course already covered in the Seventeenth Article, and it may simply have been considered unnecessary by this time to repeat the point. It may also, however, indicate an increasing awareness that the doctrine of double predestination did not always furnish “unspeakable comfort”, and that discretion rather than intimidation was now considered more appropriate.

In another respect, however, incautious wording brought the Thirty-Nine Articles into dispute with perceived orthodoxy over the issue of the ‘indefectability’ of the elect – the doctrine that (consistent with the concept of predestination) asserted that once chosen one could not lapse from grace. It had emerged with early continental Reformed Theology and had been affirmed during the reign of Edward by Bishop John Hooper, among others, who held that “The elect cannot finally fall away from grace”.<sup>38</sup> The Archdeacon of Winchester John Philpot argued the same position, but his defence is more revealing of the pressures that made such declarations necessary – allegations that predestination was a licence to sin. Philpot denied the charges on the grounds that the very purpose of election was the ordaining of the elect to “walk in righteousness and holiness”.<sup>39</sup> The source of objection came primarily from Lutherans who denied the doctrine of perseverance: Richard Hooker, in his *Learned Discourse of Justification, Works and How the Foundation of Faith is Overthrown*, observed that he “dare not here deny the possibility of their salvation, which have beene the chiefest instrument of ours: albeit they caryed to their grave a perswasion so greatly repugnant to the truth.”<sup>40</sup> Article Sixteen of the Thirty-Nine Articles (Article Fifteen of the Forty-Two) had run into controversy over a possible implication that one might fall away from grace. It stated that “After we have received the Holy Ghost, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin”. However, it went

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<sup>35</sup> *Thirty-Nine Articles*, p. 17.

<sup>36</sup> *Thirty-Nine Articles*, p. 18.

<sup>37</sup> *Thirty-Nine Articles*, p.23.

<sup>38</sup> Hooper, *Writings*, II, p. 274.

<sup>39</sup> John Philpot, *The Examinations and Writings of John Philpot, Archdeacon of Westminster: Martyr, 1555*, ed. by Robert Eden, vol. 34 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1842), pp. 223-24, 270, 307.



on to mention that “by the grace of God we may rise again, and amend our lives.” It produced consternation among Puritans<sup>41</sup>, but amounted less to a defection from indefectability than to a concern to preserve spiritual discipline. Nonetheless, the issue of perseverance was to rumble on until it exploded in confrontations with Arminianism in the next century, and was related to a more fundamental problem that was to dog experimental Calvinist attempts to read salvation: the difficulty of securing a permanent assurance.

The Thirty-Nine Articles induced trepidation by their frequent references to the decree of Reprobation. Such fears were exacerbated by ambivalence over the value of good works as evidence of election, the number and immutability of the elect, the arbitrary nature of God’s supralapsarian judgement, and by forceful reminders of the sinful nature of both despair and complacency. Moreover, such formulations of the doctrine of double predestination were now the central teaching of the Church of England, and their influence was to persist throughout periods of challenge and beleaguerment, into the later experimental Calvinism with which this study is chiefly concerned. Within this overview of the history of reformed theology up until 1600, it has already been apparent that the doctrine of double predestination generated considerable anxiety and led to numerous casuistic attempts to redress it. The enquiry will lead to a consideration of the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading salvation as a product of reformed theology; first, however, it is necessary to examine in more detail two of Calvinism’s theological ‘giants’: Calvin himself, and the English theologian William Perkins. They both made major contributions to reformed theology that were to remain central to experimental Calvinist thinking. As importantly, however, the tensions within their texts serve to illustrate the dynamics of an anxiety over salvation that was to persist into the seventeenth century.

### Calvin and the *Institutes of Christian Religion*

The *Institutes of Christian Religion* are of prime importance to any study of the anxiety over salvation that was occasioned by the doctrine of double predestination. Unlike many of the Reformed scholastics, for whom predestination was chiefly related to the topic of God’s decrees and divine providence, Calvin’s discussion of predestination was primarily related to soteriology and the problem of assurance (its treatment in the *Institutes* was separated from the doctrine of God and his

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<sup>40</sup> Richard Hooker, *A Learned Discourse of Justification, Workes, and how the Foundation of Faith is Overthrown* (Oxford: John Barnes, 1612), p. 21.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, [Thomas Cartwright?], ‘A Second Admonition to the Parliament’, in *Puritan Manifestoes*, ed. by W.H. Frere and C.E. Douglas (London: Church Historical Society, 1954), p. 118, which argues that “the Articles of Christian Religion speaketh very daungerously of falling from grace, which is to be reformed, bicause it too much enclineth to their erreure”. On the issue of the authorship of ‘A Second Admonition’, see p. vii.



providence.)<sup>42</sup> As with other reformed theologians, Calvin attached paramount importance to faith as both the means and the sign of salvation, but rather than concealing the difficulties inherent in such insistence, he exposed and grappled with them. He requires quotation at length: his prolixity is precisely the object of enquiry, for it is the product of a struggle to manipulate irreconcilable impulses and arguments into coherence. As such, his prose not only provides a key source for the development of reformed theology; it also offers valuable insights into the pressures produced by the theology of double predestination – pressures to which later experimental Calvinists were also subjected.

Calvin asserts that not only the reprobate suffer doubt over election; the faithful

are not only tempted with unquietnesse, which often times chaunceth unto them, but also are sometime shaken with most grevous terrors: so great is the vehemencie of temptation to throw down their mindes: which thing serveth not sufficiently well to agree with that assurednesse of fayth. Therefore this doubt must be answered, if we will have our aforesayde doctrine to stand. But truly, when we teach that fayth ought to be certayne and assured, we doe not imagine such a certaintie as is touched with no doubtyng, nor such an assurednesse as is assayed with no carefulnesse: but rather we saye, that the faythfull have a perptuall stryfe with their owne distrustfulnesse. So farre we be from setlyng their consciences in such a peacable quietnesse, as may be interrupted with no troubles at all yet on the other side we saye, that in what sort soever they be afflicted, they doe never fall and departe from that assured confidence whiche they have conceyved at the mercie of God.<sup>43</sup>

Calvin's prose folds back upon itself as it seeks both to undo and uphold its own premises. The rhetorical devices employed in the passage dramatise its internal conflict even as they try to conceal it. Not only are arguments set against one another; Calvin enters into dispute with himself as a projected sceptical reader. The rhetorical 'we' insinuates a complicity between the actual reader and the text, but more crucially, between two Calvins: the advocate of double predestination and its defector. The use of 'we' objectifies and unifies the alarmingly personal experience of psychological bifurcation that is doubt, subject to extremes of assurance and despair and unable to commit to either state. Obligated to acknowledge the almost physical force with which doubt overthrows the mind, Calvin struggles to bring his intellectual faculties to bear on reconciling experience and doctrine. He tries to find an argument that can accommodate emotional complexity and degrees of faith, but is hampered by the use of absolutes such as "certainty" as his conceptual tools.<sup>44</sup> The subclause "yet on

<sup>42</sup> See Edward A. Dowey, Jr. *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), pp. 186-88; Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, trans. by Philip Mairet (London: Collins, 1963), pp. 263-84.

<sup>43</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, fol. 115<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> For the shift in attitudes towards knowledge and certainty in the seventeenth century, see Barbara J. Shapiro *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).



the other side” epitomises the vacillation which is a response to polarisation and paradox, and which characterises an anxiety that by nature entertains two opposing destinies yet cannot settle on one or the other. The emphatic assertion of the final sentence only serves to emphasise the proximity of ‘distrustfulness’ and ‘confidence’ in the psyche gripped by double predestination. At the same time, assurance may never seem so far away as when self-examination fails to find the kernel of confidence that supposedly resides inside even the most extreme despair – if one is among the elect. An alternative prospect comes into view: one’s despair may be that of the reprobate.

The doubting of salvation that emerges from the *Institutes* is self-perpetuating; Calvin’s critique of faith compounded the problem from the other direction. He continued to cling to the Lutheran concept of the unity of faith, but just as his attachment to absolutes made more arduous the route to salvation, so the association of reprobation with the incomplete and partial makes the road to ruin all the more slippery. Calvin’s introduction of the doctrines of temporary faith and unconscious pretence wedded frail belief to the decree of reprobation. The doctrine of temporary faith suggested that those fortunate enough to think they did possess faith might in fact be suffering from delusion:

The reprobate are sometimes moved wyth the same feeling that the elect are, so that in their own judgement thei nothing differ from the electe...the lorde, the more to condemn them and make them inexcusable, conveyeth himselfe into their mindes so fare forth, as his goodnesse may be tasted without the spirit of adoption.<sup>45</sup>

Calvin anticipates the impact the doctrine of temporary faith might have on the weak believer:

If any object, that then there remaineith nothing more to the faithful whereby to prove certainly their adoption: I answere that though there be a great likenesse and affinitee between the elect of God, and them that are endued with a fallinge faith for a time, yet there liveth in the elect onely that affiance whiche Paule speaketh of, that thei crie with full mouthe, Abba, father.<sup>46</sup>

Delusion is not the fault of a God who maliciously awakens souls only to abandon them, but is due to the individual’s neglect of proper self-scrutiny. It is all too easy to confuse carnal security with assurance of faith: confidence might really be complacency. Having systematically removed all grounds for confidence, Calvin then argues that confidence is the only means of escape from anxiety. The argument is circular and severs any route towards assurance; it also mirrors perfectly the reality of a faith beyond reason or willed approach.

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<sup>45</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, fol. 112<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>46</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, fol. 112<sup>v</sup>.



Calvin continues to dwell upon the inadequate interpretative powers of the reprobate, who “do never conceive but a confused feelinge of grace, so that they rather take holde of the shadowe than of the sounde bodie”, and he admits that it is virtually impossible for the reprobate to distinguish between genuine and ‘fallinge’ faith:

It is truely sayde, that the reprobate beleve God to be mercyfull unto them, because they receyve the gifte of reconciliation, although confusedly and not plainly enough... They seme to have as well as they [the elect], the same beginnings of fayth, under a cloke of hypocrisie.<sup>47</sup>

The doctrine of temporary faith created yet more anxiety over salvation, as even a sure sense of faith, if one was lucky enough to possess it, could no longer be taken as evidence of salvation. Rather than a true self-assessment, temporary faith is a mis-reading and self-deception: the reprobate “beguile not only other mens eyes, but also their owne myndes”:

It is not true that some do counterfayte a shew of faythe, which yet do lacke the true faith, but while they are caried wyth a sodeyne violent motion of zeale, they deceyve themselves wyth false opinion, And it is no doubte that sluggishnesse so possesseth them, that they doe not well examine their heart as they ought to have done.<sup>48</sup>

The notion of unconscious pretence both redoubled the imperative towards self-examination, and stripped it of its authority to reassure. After the emphasis on the affective powers of grace, it also sounded a note of caution: saving heart-work must be distinguished from superficial zeal.

The very insistence on the importance of faith as a means and sign of salvation subjected it to an ‘uncomfortable’ level of scrutiny, and Calvin’s doctrines of temporary faith and unconscious pretence eroded assurance still further. His attempts to articulate and defend his theology produced a text that grapples with its own contradictions and which cannot shake off a sense of the unjustness of its message. Luther had based his theology on faith out of an awareness that thought could rapidly lead to the unthinkable. It was that attitude which allowed him to walk away from the ‘other half’ of his doctrine of predestination. Calvin could not so easily ignore the objections of the rational mind; reason insisted on the double nature of the decree, and resisted its apparent paradoxes and injustices. Rehearsing the usual warning against too much searching into matters divine - “the entreatyng of predestination whereas of it selfe it is somewhat cumbersome, is made very doutfull yea and dangerous, the curiousnesse of men is the case” - he goes on to argue: “rather lett us willyngly absteyne from the searchyng of that knowledge, whereof the excessyce covetyng is both foolishe and

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<sup>47</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, fol. 112<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, fol. 112<sup>v</sup>; sig. 113<sup>v</sup>.

perillous, yea and deadly." He observes that those who seek to "pearce into the secrete closets of the wisdom of God...shal entre into a maze whereof he shall fynde no way to get out againe." The labyrinthine nature of his own prose suggests that he may be commenting from experience. However, he is reluctant to give up the task of reconciling the doctrine of double predestination to the intellect, and argues that it is possible to err too far in the other direction, citing those who

when they have a will to remedy this evel, doe commaunde all mention of Predestination to be in a manner buried, at the least they teach men to flee from every maner of questionyng therof as from a rocke... because they descende to muche beneath the meane, they little prevaile with the witte of manne, which doothe not lyghtly suffre it selfe to be restrained.<sup>49</sup>

Calvin's desire to convince more nervous theologians aims at a familiar pressure point, the need to preserve the concept of God's omniscience:

Who are so ware and so fearfull that they would have predestination to be buried, least it should trouble weake soules: with what color, I beseeche you, will they cover theyr arrogance, when they indirectlye accuse God of foolishe inadvisednesse, as though he foresaw not the danger, which thei think themselves to have wisely mett with.<sup>50</sup>

The recognition of the dangers of reluctant reason, yet the inability to condemn or dismiss it, is one of the major fault-lines running through Calvin's engagement with predestination. As on other matters, he veers between opposing approaches but never manages to secure an effective middle ground because his theology, with its rigid adherence to absolutes, will not allow it. His long-winded arguments and counter-arguments are the noise of someone arguing himself into a corner. If faith is rooted in paradox, doubt is the motion of a mind that cannot relinquish itself to that contradiction. Calvin's rhetoric would like to give his theology *credibility*, to reconcile it to man's intellect as well as to his soul. When that is impossible, faith is invoked instead, as in this earlier passage which is ostensibly on eternal election, but which is really far more preoccupied with reprobation. It is again addressed to an objecting reader; it is appropriate that a theology beset by internal conflict should define itself through opposition. Eternal election is

(as many think) a combersome question: because they thynke nothing to be lesse reasonable that of the common multitude of men some to be foreordained to salvation, other some to destruction. But how they wrongfully encombre themselves, shall afterwarde be evident by the framynge of the mater together. Beside that in the very same darknesse which maketh men afrayde, not only the profitableness of doctrine but also the most swete fruite sheweth forth itselfe.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, fols 239<sup>r</sup>, 239<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, fol. 240<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, fol. 238<sup>v</sup>



However, Calvin's subsequent 'framing of the matter' cannot escape the position Luther had set out before him, and from which, as soon as he had declared his allegiance, he had tried to depart: the utility of obscurity. Perplexity is reasonable, fear sweet; the passage is in fact a sophisticated education into the logic of faith. The difficult relationship between reason and faith was to find further expression in tensions between the two experimental Calvinist models of reading the Word, hermeneutic and experiential.

Calvin never fully answers or assimilates the dissenting voice he impersonates for the purposes of correction. Understanding that those who fear they are not "the propre possession of God" shall "with continual trembling be miserable", his own text worries away at itself, revisiting and repeating its arguments with a restless insecurity.<sup>52</sup> Its unease propels it into an extremism that in turn heightens doubt; a 'trembling' oscillation between polarities. One begins to understand how double predestination exerted its peculiar grip on the psyche, no less for observing the tensions it produced in the work of its major protagonist. John Carroll, in his study *Puritan, Paranoid, Remissive – A Sociology of Modern Culture*, provides an insightful (and neglected) analysis:

Calvinism gains power not only from its articulation of fate and the ensuing paradox of guilt, but from a whole series of dualisms. [Calvinism] holds in effect that 'redemption is available but man never escapes his guilt; assurance is possible, yet man can never be confident; wisdom is crucial, but man never understands much; man must work, but works are irrelevant; man is responsible for himself, yet God determines all.' This is a theology of ambivalence and here resides its deepest psychological pull... There is a last consideration relevant to Calvinism's psychological plausibility. The dualist universal...has a complementary opposite: the monist universal establishes the principle that all is ultimately united and harmonious, that the same purpose governs all things, that the same truth encompasses all things. Men inform and sustain their dualist reality with hope for a monist utopia: Calvinism also accommodates the monist universal with peculiar success. It does so through the extremity of its doctrine of divine omnipotence, its assertion that a single entity, God, determines all, according to his own single purpose. Man accordingly has one end in life, to attain salvation; all he does and knows has significance only in terms of that end. Calvinism, taken as a whole, provides a symbolic powerfully representing the totality of the dualist-monist dialectic.<sup>53</sup>

The dualist-monist dialectic identified by Carroll is intrinsic to the theology of double predestination in general, but Calvin, more than any other writer, engages with it and reproduces the tensions it involves. His assertion that the faithful were always aware of a certain confidence even in the midst of their doubt would have alarmed those who searched their hearts for it in vain. Furthermore, the

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<sup>52</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, fol. 239<sup>r</sup>.

doctrines of temporary faith and unconscious pretence brought into question whatever residue of assurance the weak believer might be fortunate enough to discern. It was an ideological system that held emotional and intellectual sway over the psyche precisely because it was based in paradox yet demanded unity; introspection and anxiety were its watch-words. Calvin responded to double predestination by applauding its obscurity even as he struggled to clarify it, and that resulted in a prose style marked by prolixity and repetition as he circled round and around his inaccessible subject. Experimental Calvinist autobiographers were to develop other textual strategies by which to graft themselves onto the narrative of double predestination, but for all the changes wrought by a century of theological dispute, the pressures to which they were responding can still be seen in their most essential potency in Calvin's *Institutes of Christian Religion*.

### Perkins and *A Golden Chaine*

William Perkins was the most influential English theologian to expound the theology of double predestination at the end of the sixteenth century. He considered himself indebted to "Master Calvin of blessed memory", whom he described as "that worthie instrument of the Gospel".<sup>54</sup> In addition to Luther and Calvin, he also made reference to the work of Martyr and Beza, among others;<sup>55</sup> he was embedded in the tradition of reformed theology that preceded him. He also represents an important staging post for Puritanism: the emphases and concerns he brought to the tradition, and his articulation of them in his writings, became a measure of 'orthodox' reformed theology for generations after him, and for experimental Calvinists in particular. In addition to writing seminal works on Calvinism, Perkins preached and taught at Christ's College, Cambridge, and was lecturer at St Andrew's church in that city. His major influence lay in teaching men who would become parish clergy, and thus his work, which combined scholastic and practical approaches, can be assumed to have had considerable, if indirect, impact upon lay Calvinists. Thirty years after his death, Archbishop Laud's visitors to regions with Puritan tendencies found that Perkins' books were commoner there than the Prayer Book, and the Savoy Declaration of Faith (the definitive statement of experimental Calvinist principles of Congregationalism) was to pay tribute to him in 1658.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> John Carroll, *Puritan, Paranoid, Remissive: A Sociology of Modern Culture* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 128.

<sup>54</sup> William Perkins, 'A Treatise of Predestination', and 'An Exposition of Christ's Sermon in the Mount', in *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the University of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, 3 vols. (Cambridge: John Legat, 1612-1613), II, p. 616, III, p. 210. [Hereafter referred to as *Workes*.]

<sup>55</sup> For allusions to Martyr, see Perkins, *Workes*, I, p. 553, II, pp. 629, 640; for allusions to Beza, see I, p. 640, II, pp. 614, 616, III, p. 696.

<sup>56</sup> Trevor Roper, *Archbishop Laud, 1573-1645* (London: Macmillan, 1940), p. 17. *A Declaration of the Faith and Order Owned and practised in the Congregational Churches in England, Agreed upon and consented unto by their Elders and Messengers in their Meeting at the Savoy, Octob. 12. 1658* (London: D.L. 1658), sig. B4<sup>r</sup>. [Hereafter referred to as *Savoy Declaration*.]



Perkins' most significant work on predestination was *Armilla Aurea* published in 1590, and translated into English as *A Golden Chaine* in 1591.<sup>57</sup> Appended to it was *An excellent treatise of comforting such as are troubled about their Predestination*, an indication that Perkins found anxiety over election widespread enough to cause him concern. *A Golden Chaine* was also sensitive to the problem of doubt over salvation, which it considered an evil temptation:

The temptation is an illusion which the devil casteth into the hearts of godlie men: as when he saith, thou art not justified: thou hast no faith: thou must certainly be condemned for thy sins.<sup>58</sup>

The external agency of the devil substituted for the internal dynamics of a theology that give rise to such "temptation". Perkins advised his readers that "the preservative is in temptation, not to behold faith but the object of faith, which is Christ", offering a welcome route of withdrawal from the morbid introspection demanded by writers such as Calvin. Later in *A Golden Chain*, Perkins elaborated upon his earlier advice:

To fight against all doubting and diffidence of our salvation... the anker of hope must be fixed in the trueth, and stabilitie of the immutable good pleasure of God: so that albeit our faith be so tossed, as that it is in danger of shipwracke, neverthelesse it must never sink to the bottome, but even in the middes of daunger, take hold upon repentance, as on a board, and so recover itselfe.<sup>59</sup>

Perkins' metaphor of the shipwreck may have owed something to the image of the rock that Calvin had used, but here the suggestion was that one might recover faith through one's own endeavour. Calvin had suggested that the faithful always have an atom of certain knowledge somewhere; Perkins was more helpful in suggesting that it is a matter of what one chose to focus on. That thinking was to find expression in experimental Calvinist theology with its emphasis on the person and sufferings of Christ as the only true source of man's redemption.<sup>60</sup>

However, just as Perkins seemed to imply that truth lay beyond the buffetings of subjective perception, at the same time he maintained the argument that evidences of faith are incontrovertible and derive from God:

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<sup>57</sup> See Introduction, footnote 56.

<sup>58</sup> Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, sig. R2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, sig. R2<sup>v</sup>, X<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> For discussion of the experimental Calvinist focus on the saving power of Christ in the works of John Owen and John Bunyan, see chapter two, pp. 67-68. On Luther and Christocentrism, see Skevington Wood, pp. 169-178.

It is out of all controversie, that God by his spirite, word, and effects of predestination, giveth certain testimonies to such as are his children, that they are elect and shal be saved.<sup>61</sup>

Unlike Calvin, however, he provided a more tangible framework for such testimonies, based on the 'Ordo Salutis' derived from Peter Martyr and inscribed in the Thirty-Nine articles. Perkins discussed the doctrine at length, breaking it down into its constituent parts, and subdividing those still further in his attempt to nail down the steps leading to salvation. In his outline of the doctrine he stated:

For they whom God elected to this end, that they should inherite eternall life, were also elected to these subordinat means, whereby, as by steppes, they might attaine this ende, and without which it were impossible to obtain it. Rom.8.29.30. *those which he knew* before, he also predestinate to be made like the image of his sone, that hee might be the first born amongst many brethren: moreover whom he predestinate, them he called, whom he called, them he justified, and whom he justified, them also he glorified.<sup>62</sup>

The 'Ordo Salutis' radically subverted the binarism of the theology of double predestination, providing a *progressive* structure with which to compare one's approach to salvation without compromising the preordained nature of that journey. Individuals could now measure a developing, rather than a perfect faith. The initial 'calling' was characterised by the "saving hearing of the word of God":

inwardlye the eyes of the minde are enlightened, the hart and eares opened, that he may see, hear, and understand the preaching of the word of God.<sup>63</sup>

A saving hearing of the Word led to a "mollifying of the hart, the which must be brused in peeces", in order that faith, "a miraculous and supernatural facultie of the hart" could be "applied by the operation of the Holy Ghost". The 'works' of faith were further divided into knowledge of the gospel, hope of pardon, hungering after grace and the approach to grace. Faith was an "effectiuall certificate" from the Holy Ghost, an evidence, guarantee, and contract of election. Most significantly for those in doubt of their spiritual status, Perkins made explicit the notion that faith might come by degrees. The highest was a "full assurance", but he was at pains to recognise the worth of even "a little or weak faith, like a grain of mustard seed, or smoking flaxe, which can neither give out heat nor flame, but onely smoake." A little faith could be used to stir up more, and "God doth not despise the least sparke of faith." Faith was followed by Justification (the remission of sins and the imputation of Christ's righteousness) and Sanctification "wherby such as beleieve...are by little and

<sup>61</sup> Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, sig. T6<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>62</sup> Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, sig. D2<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>63</sup> Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, sig. P5<sup>r</sup>. Saving hearing was central to the experimental Calvinist model of experiential reading, and is discussed at length in Chapter Three.



little renewed in holiness, and righteousness". Glorification was the final destination of the elect.<sup>64</sup> The structure of the Ordo Salutis persisted into the theology of experimental Calvinists, and was to provide a narrative model for their autobiographical accounts of conversion.

The prospect that salvation might arrive little by little was a source of hope for those who looked into their hearts and found themselves wanting. Perkins used the doctrine to point out that

they therefore do very ill, who are still in a doubt of their salvation, because as yet they feele not in themselves, especiall motions of God's spirite.<sup>65</sup>

Related to the Ordo Salutis, and even more important to the impulse to produce autobiography, was the doctrine of preparation. It offered a release from the passivity imposed by double predestination, but significantly, could only do so by contravening its basic tenets. That conflict was to shadow experimental Calvinist life-writings which, as acts of preparation, were undermined by their own ontology. Key to an understanding of diary, conversion narrative, and spiritual autobiography as tools for redressing the anxiety of reading salvation, it is necessary to trace the development of the doctrine of preparation in some detail.

The Thirty-Nine Articles had stated unequivocally that

the condition of man, after the fall of Adam, is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself by his own natural strength and good works to faith and calling upon God.<sup>66</sup>

That the doctrine of Preparation should have emerged at all is an indication of how Calvinism began to deconstruct itself under the pressure of its own impossible demands.<sup>67</sup> Perkins was again the focal point for the expression of a tradition that had been growing previous to the publication of *A Golden Chaine*. Its emergence reveals the complicated manouvres to which churchmen had to resort in order to fulfill both their theological and their pastoral responsibilities. If the doctrine of Preparation seemed to contravene the fundamental tenets of predestination, that contradiction originated in the scriptures, from which passages could be cited both for and against it. Endorsements of preparation were found in such passages as 1 Samuel 7.3 "Prepare your hearts unto the Lord"; and Job 2.13,15: "If thou prepare thine heart, and stretch out thine hands toward him...then truly shalt thou lift up thy

<sup>64</sup> Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, sigs. P5<sup>v</sup>, P7<sup>r</sup> (cf. Matthew 17.20: "If ye have faith as much as is a graine of mustard seed... nothing shall be impossible unto you", *Geneva Bible*, fol 10<sup>v</sup>), Q<sup>r</sup>, O1<sup>v</sup>, S3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>65</sup> Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, sig. P7<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> *Thirty-Nine Articles*, p. 15.

<sup>67</sup> For the history of the doctrine of Preparation, see Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966).



face without spot". Paul also had warned the Corinthians to be ready lest he find them "unprepared" (II Corinthians 9.3,4). Other scriptures, however, were taken to mean that it was God, not man, who effected the work of preparation: Psalm 10.17 "Lord, thou hast heard the desire of the poor: thou preparest their heart" and Proverbs. 16.1,9: "The heart of man proposeth his way, but the Lord doth direct his steps". To the latter the Geneva Bible added the following marginal note: "He derideth the presumption of man, who dare attribute to himself anything, as to prepare his heart or such like."<sup>68</sup> The issue of preparation opened up a fault-line in reformed theology, and its development was at first tentative. In England its emergence began with Richard Greenham who was born in c.1535 and who was installed as pastor at Dry Drayton, Cambridgeshire, in 1570. His collected writings had reached 5 editions by 1612, and reveal a telling ambivalence as to whether preparation is effected by man or God. He seems to argue the latter in his comment that

Before the Apostles received that great gift, the sending down of the Holy Ghost upon them, they were shaken with a great wind, and after so solemn a preparation, they were endued with the secret graces of the spirit.<sup>69</sup>

Here even the preparation that preceded grace came in the form of a visitation upon the passive recipient. Later, however, Greenham comes dangerously close to suggesting that man can make some approach towards God through his own efforts:

The first thing... is preparation...we cannot see our hearts without the Word. And if in the Word we will see our hearts, then we must bring them to the presence of God...If we bring ourselves to God's presence we shall be greatly humbled.<sup>70</sup>

Such equivocation is even more apparent in the work of the Puritan Lecturer Richard Rogers. His *Seven Treatises* were published in 1592, and his diary was an early example of the impact of the concept of preparation upon autobiographical writing (in it he wrote "When strength over corruption is lost...I would to God, when I cannot presently recover my self, yet that I might goe about it litle by litle").<sup>71</sup> Rogers described with considerable insight the anxiety of those who failed to discern an affective spiritual growth or renewal in themselves:

That which most troubleth the weak about this matter is that this change of the hart, and renewing thereof, is so hardly seen and so meanly felt within them, that they cannot satisfy themselves...Now idle motions and vain thoughts and fantasies

<sup>68</sup> *Geneva Bible*, fol 272<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>69</sup> Richard Greenham, *Works*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (London: William Welby, 1612), pp. 269-70.

<sup>70</sup> Greenham, p. 561.

<sup>71</sup> Richard Rogers, *Seven Treatises*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: T. Man, 1610) The *Seven Treatises* had been reissued seven times by 1630. *Diary 1586-90* (Dr. Williams's Library, Baxter's Quarto MSS, Unbound 3.61.13 treatise 17), 12<sup>th</sup> September 1587. Extracts from the diary are published in *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, ed. by M.M. Knappen (Chicago: The American Society of Church History, London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1933).



much trouble them; now they fear they believe not...They fear that they are not renewed and changed at all.<sup>72</sup>

Rogers was hoping to alleviate such fears through his argument that the Spirit, far from coming in a 'sudden rush of wind', operated more quietly in four stages or works (distinct from, but reminiscent of Perkins' four 'works' of faith already mentioned). These were a familiarity with the Law, a consideration of oneself, a sense of humiliation, and a softened heart that hungered for mercy. The Lutheran concept of the unity of saving faith began to wobble under the gentle pressure of gradualism, and Rogers' unease at this is evident in his comment on such 'works' that "although none of these be faith, yet I say they are not without it."<sup>73</sup>

As well as furthering the doctrine of Preparation, Richard Rogers also asserted the doctrine of perseverance. He affirmed that "he that is new borne can never die"; he promised his readers that any subsequent backslidings "shal turne to thy goode" and he advised them to "be of good comfort, thy greatest danger is past".<sup>74</sup> Rogers used the doctrines of preparation and perseverance to assuage doubt over election; that dual manipulation was to be echoed in the literary strategies adopted by experimental Calvinist autobiographers.

While at Cambridge Perkins often visited Greenham in Dry Drayton, and, like Rogers and other contemporaries,<sup>75</sup> he was both attracted and resistant to the doctrine of Preparation. In line with orthodox Calvinism and the Thirty-Nine Articles he maintained that "no sinner can prepare himself to his own conversion", but he also framed the argument, (premised on his concept of the possibility of a weak faith) that a man who "doth but begin to be converted" is "even at that very instant the very child of God" even if "inwardly he be more carnal than spiritual".<sup>76</sup> Thus with an ability to circumvent paradox worthy of Calvin himself, Perkins managed to assert that conversion was both absolute *and* gradual, and offered this to his readers as a source of comfort:

Mark then, that as yet thou want firm and lively grace, yet art thou not altogether void of grace, if thou canst unfeignedly desire it. Thy desire is the seed, conception, or bud of that which thou wantest.<sup>77</sup>

Perkins' deft manipulation of an intractable theology was both extremely subtle and wilfully obtuse.

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<sup>72</sup> Rogers, *Seven Treatises*, p. 52.

<sup>73</sup> Rogers, *Seven Treatises*, pp. 20-21

<sup>74</sup> Rogers, *Seven Treatises*, pp. 39, 138. See also pp. 44, 500, 549.

<sup>75</sup> Others interested in the doctrine of Preparation during this period included, for example, Laurence Chaderton (1536?-1640); John Dod (1549?-1645); and Arthur Hildersham (1563-1632).

<sup>76</sup> Perkins, 'Of God's Free Grace and Man's Free Will', in *Workes*, I, 733. *A Golden Chaine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge: John Legate, 1597), p. 129.

<sup>77</sup> *Golden Chaine*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, p. 129.

The doctrine of Preparation was an attempt to deflect the pressure brought to bear by the constraints of Calvinism, yet, like its host theology, it was necessarily founded upon paradox. However, the suggestion that something at least similar to human endeavour could bring about a *gradual* change in one's spiritual state was deeply subversive of the binary structures of Calvinist thought, and was to destabilise the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of reading. The integral connection between reading, writing, and the transforming power of the Spirit is suggested by Perkins' concept of the "Beginnings of *Composition*" [my italics] that, he argued, followed on for the elect from the "Beginnings of Preparation." For the reprobate, preparation could provide them with "the fruits of the law" and no more. The elect, however, would enjoy the "beginnings of composition", "those inward motions and inclinations of God's spirit that follow after". Only in the elect is the aspiration to become regenerate "the effect of regeneration begun".<sup>78</sup> Thus the ability to read the Word aright that it might mollify the heart was consequent upon one's predestined status. The concept of preparation gave one something to do in the meantime, and provided an outlet for anxiety, but it could not alter the possibility that one's attempts might be fruitless in the end.

Alongside the doctrine of preparation, Perkins also employed the doctrine of perseverance, or the indefectability of the elect, to bolster confidence among those who might fear their faith was wavering. He stated that

We denie not but grace may in part, and for a time be lost, to the end that the faithful may thereby acknowledge and know ther weaknes, and for it be humbled: but that there is any total or final falling away from grace, wee utterly denie.<sup>79</sup>

Doubt was characterised by fluctuation; the temporality of human emotion, be it of assurance or despair, could be alleviated by the promise of the permanence of one's election. Experimental Calvinist autobiographers were to emulate the doctrine of perseverance in their use of inscription to confer stability and permanence upon wavering faith.

Perkins' articulation of the Ordo Salutis and the doctrines of preparation and perseverance strengthened hope for those troubled by doubts over their election. However, in other respects he contributed greatly to the anxiety of his readers, and his readers' readers. Perkins was particularly

<sup>78</sup> Perkins, 'A Graine of Musterd-Seede, or, the Least Measure of Grace that is or can be Effectuall to Salvation', in *Workes*, I, 638-41.

<sup>79</sup> Perkins, *A Golden Chaine*, 2nd edn, p. 190. The 1597 edition has an expanded 51<sup>st</sup> Chapter on the errors of the Roman church, in which the passage appears; it is not present in the 1591 edition.



responsible for perpetuating the doctrine of temporary faith that had been initiated by Calvin,<sup>80</sup> and he also furthered Beza's doctrine of "ineffectuall calling"<sup>81</sup> – the notion that the individual might exhibit all the appearances, to him or her self and to others, of the elect, such as sanctification, without being truly called. More fundamental, however, was his adoption of Ramism as an organising principle of his work: it reinforced the decree of Reprobation and reified the binary nature of double predestination, both of which gave rise to severe doubt over one's spiritual status.

Ramus – Pierre de la Ramee – had developed a method of logic with the objective that it should be simple and accessible to use. It was a dichotomizing system, and its followers tended to produce arguments in which issues were divided, each strand sub-divided, and so on. Walter J. Ong, in his study of Ramism, argues that

The Ramist dichotomies have little, if any real theoretical foundation... The urge to, and practice of, dichotomization, preceded the theory.<sup>82</sup>

However Ong omits to point out that that impulse, however universal, may have derived additional urgency from the fact that Ramus was himself a Protestant. Ramism was prominent in Cambridge in the 1590s<sup>83</sup> and the impact of the method on Perkins' theology is epitomised in the 'Survey, or Table declaring the Order of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation' that accompanied *A Golden Chaine*; such bifurcating tables were a frequent feature of Ramist works. The table makes starkly emphatic the route of reprobation, with its bold black line, that parallels the decree of election. By contrast the route to salvation appears less substantial, and is complicated by a multitude of detours. A kind of spiritual 'snakes and ladders', its graphic impact conveyed a reified alteriority. It was aimed particularly at the less educated: Perkins hoped that it might serve

Instead of an *ocular catechism* to them which cannot read: for by the pointing of the finger they may sensibly perceive the chiefe points of religion, and the order of them.<sup>84</sup>

The 'reader who could not read' was thus encouraged to develop an embodied relationship with predestination. The tracing by finger, its extension into the hand and arm, might have led to an even

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<sup>80</sup> See Robert T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p.7. Kendall suggests that "The teaching seems to have begun with Calvin himself and to have been perpetuated especially by Perkins."

<sup>81</sup> *Golden Chaine*, sig. V2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>82</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 199.

<sup>83</sup> Others at that time and later who adopted the method included Laurence Chaderton, Gabriel Harvey, George Downham, William Ames, William Chapell, and John Milton. Henson, p. 29.

<sup>84</sup> For a reproduction of Perkins' 'Table', see p. 55. The table does not appear in either the 1591 or the 1597 editions of the *A Golden Chaine* held in the British Library; the reproduction is taken from 'A Golden Chaine' in William Perkins, *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, (London: John Legatt, 1612), I, between pp. 10–11.

greater affective investment in the stages along the journey. The use of the body to assist the process of memorising would have effected a particularly invasive form of indoctrination, embedding the ideology not only in the verbal memory, as was common, but also in a physical identification with one's fate. One can only speculate as to whether Perkins' table did in fact reach its intended audience; it is quite possible that enthusiastic pastors may have taken up his suggestion and used the table in the teaching of their communities. Certainly, however, its influence was wide-reaching. The impact of Ramism upon Puritanism has long been recognised;<sup>85</sup> however, the importance of Ramism, and more particularly, of Perkins' table, for later generations of Calvinists has generally been neglected. Donald K McKim, for example, argues that for subsequent Puritans such as Owen and Baxter "the Ramistic framework was gone"<sup>86</sup>, but he seems unaware that others still adhered to it. The theologian William Ames, associated with the beginnings of Independency, inserted twenty-five pages of bifurcating tables at the beginning of *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, and defended his use of Ramist method and logic more explicitly than Perkins had done. John Bunyan was to produce his own Ramist Map derived from that of Perkins, and the Congregationalist Samuel Petto also included Ramist tables in his work on the old and new covenants.<sup>87</sup>

It is not surprising that Perkins should have attempted to map and chart predestination; the notion of a journey is implied in the very term, and Ramism revived the origins of the word 'method' as a 'pursuit', a 'following after' or a 'way through'<sup>88</sup>. However, Perkins' cartography served only to expose the very difficulty of knowing where one currently was, where one had come from, and where one was headed. It was hard to tell whether one's calling was effectual or ineffectual, whether one's faith was genuine or merely temporary, awaiting relapse a little further down the line. As John Stachniewski argues in *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair*:

By formalising the signs which distinguished the elect from the reprobate... Perkins certainly did not allay anxiety. [He] erected a structure for it to occupy.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, 1939 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), pp. 7, 116, 312; Keith L. Sprunger, *The Learned Doctor Ames: Dutch Backgrounds of English and American Puritanism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1972), pp. 109, 129, 136; John F. Wilson *Pulpit in Parliament: Puritanism during the English Civil Wars, 1640 – 1648* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), pp. 139–40.

<sup>86</sup> Donald K. McKim, *Ramism in William Perkins' Theology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 125.

<sup>87</sup> William Ames, *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity* (London: Edward Griffin, 1638), sig. A3<sup>v</sup>; John Bunyan, 'A Mapp Shewing the Order and Causes of Salvation and Damnation', in John Bunyan, *The Works of that Eminent Servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan* (London: William Marshall, 1692), before p. 1; Samuel Petto, *The Difference between the Old and New Covenants*, (London: [n.pub], 1674).

<sup>88</sup> See Walter J. Ong, p. 225. Ong points out that "Ramus lived in an age when there was no word in ordinary usage which clearly expressed what we mean today by "method", a series of ordered steps gone through to produce with certain efficacy a desired effect – a routine of efficiency".

<sup>89</sup> John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination; English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p.26.



The marriage between Calvinism and Ramism was a natural one, for dualistic thinking was at the core of both. In reformation scholasticism, where the coherence of theological arguments took precedence over their psychological impact, the decree of salvation seemed to *require* the decree of reprobation if one was to maintain the absolute nature of God's benefice towards those he chose to elect. This meant that, competing with the practical, pastoral element of Perkins' discourse, was another component that needed to defend and assert the decree of reprobation. The growth of Arminianism in the early decades of the next century was to heighten the issue even more, but even in 1591 Perkins felt the need to argue against those of Lutheran inclination who

make the name of Predestination proper only to the Elect, as though God had not predetermined the reprobate, but only foreknowen that such should bee reprobates; fearing least in so doing, they should make God a cause, why the reprobates are damned.<sup>90</sup>

In the process of defending the decree of reprobation, *A Golden Chaine* takes on an even more punitive tone than Calvin's *Institutes*.<sup>91</sup> Perkins' attempt (reminiscent of Augustine) to use reprobation to underpin God's goodness only emphasises the fact that the majority cannot expect salvation:

This also serveth to set out God's goodnes, in that his benefit is not common to all men. For we usually admire nothing, but that which is rare.<sup>92</sup>

Perkins seems to offer a glimpse of martyrdom to the reprobate when he comments that "they have their use as instruction", but he is ambivalent as to whether God hates them or not, arguing first that He does not, but then that "He ordeined it to be subject to his hatred."<sup>93</sup> He is however far from ambivalent in his account of the torments that await the reprobate:

The reprobates when they die, doe become without sense and astonied, like a stone: or else they are overwhelmed with a terrible horreur of conscience, and despairing of their salvation, as it were, with the gulfe of the sea overturning them.<sup>94</sup>

His prose becomes more vivid, and similes abound as his imagination catches fire at the thought of God's wrath. The fact that reprobation often made 'better copy' than salvation was inevitably a factor in its potency to arrest and alarm the weak believer.

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<sup>90</sup> *Golden Chaine*, sig. T2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>91</sup> John S. Bray argues that Calvin had actually placed less emphasis on Reprobation than his 'successor', Beza. John S. Bray, *Theodore Beza's Doctrine of Predestination* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1975), p. 14.

<sup>92</sup> *Golden Chaine*, sig. T3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>93</sup> *Golden Chaine*, sig. T8<sup>v</sup>.

*A Golden Chaine* provided lifelines for struggling Calvinists in its clear expression of the Ordo Salutis and the doctrines of preparation and perseverance. However, its binary Ramist methodology, and its emphatic assertion of the decree of reprobation, took away with one hand what it had given with the other, and furthered the punitive severity of the theology of double predestination. Unlike Calvin's *Institutes*, *A Golden Chaine* reveals less a man in conflict with himself than a contest between competing scholastic and pastoral discourses. That tension between reprimand and consolation was to persist in the theology of experimental Calvinists, and to inform both their reading of the Word, and their writing of autobiography.

### Conclusion

The reformed theology of double predestination was beset with internal contradictions that were to persist into later experimental Calvinism. Attempts to bridge the binary structures of an ideology founded in paradox resulted in tension and ambivalence. Assurance was vital to salvation; it might waver but was never absent. Complacency was sinful; despair equally so. Humans had no free-will to do anything other than evil, and works had no merit, but sanctification and perseverance might suggest evidence of election. Preparation was required, even though salvation lay solely in the gift of God's grace. Regeneration was conferred in an instant yet might be approached through the progressive stages of the Ordo Salutis. This ambivalence compounded the intrinsic uncertainty over one's spiritual status fostered by double predestination. Above all, the business of reading oneself and the Word for signs of salvation was both intensified and undermined by the possibility that one's faith might be temporary, one's calling ineffectual, and one's understanding clouded with unconscious pretence. Reformed theology undermined assurance even as it asserted that it was both possible and essential.

The intrinsic conflicts of Calvinism found expression even in its most orthodox and revered expositions. Calvin's *Institutes* were characterised by prolixity as a means of both chasing and deferring a resolution that could never be reached. Perkins' *Golden Chaine* could not reconcile its scholastic rigor with its pastoral responsibilities. Both texts responded to their own internal fractures with more extreme formulations of the theology that had originally engendered them.

There were three main features of the theology that furthered anxiety and despair: the absolute nature of reprobation and salvation; the impotence of the human will to do anything other than evil; and the fleeting nature of assurance in the face of such pressures. Three emerging doctrines sought to answer

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<sup>94</sup> *Golden Chaine*, sig. V5r.



and alleviate these concerns, but sometimes they could only do so by ignoring the fundamental tenets of their parent theology. The *Ordo Salutis* attempted to straddle the polarities of damnation and salvation by introducing a series of spiritual stages between the two. It restored a progressive narrative to a theology that had disrupted narrative sequence with its placing of the end or 'destination' at the beginning. The *Ordo Salutis* was to inform experimental Calvinist attempts to create progressive accounts of conversion. The doctrine of preparation tentatively reinstated the validity of human endeavour in the journey towards salvation; it was a labour that focused on the right reading of oneself and of the Word. The conflict between preparation and predestination was reflected in a simultaneous use and distrust of human agency in the attempt to read – and write – salvation. Finally, the doctrine of perseverance was designed to afford comfort to those who found their faith wavering and unstable. It constrained fluctuating spiritual states within an axiom of permanence. However, it could not answer the concerns of weak believers, and experimental Calvinist autobiographers were to seek ways of reconciling the presence of assurance with its permanence through different strategies of inscription.

The essential dynamics of reformed theology were established during the Sixteenth Century, and already one can glimpse something of the impact it was to have on the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading and writing salvation. The following chapter recounts how the internal tensions of reformed theology erupted in the first half of the seventeenth century, before proceeding to a more extended exploration of the growth of experimental Calvinism, and a radically altered context for the reformed theological orthodoxy to which they claimed to aspire.







## Chapter Two

### 'Invisible Saints': Experimental Calvinism and the Anxiety of Discerning Salvation

#### Introduction

Throughout the first half of the seventeenth century, the most fundamental elements of the theology of double predestination came under pressure and accusation, and it adapted itself in ways that were to have a shaping influence upon the experimental Calvinism that emerged during the 1640s and 1650s. The period saw shifts in the political fortune of Calvinism, and the demise of the hegemony it had enjoyed at the turn of the century impacted upon the articulation of a theology that was by nature deeply divisive. There is not scope within this investigation to discuss in any detail the political and theological shifts that occurred between 1600 and 1650. Briefly, the doctrine of Reprobation came under attack from Arminianism,<sup>1</sup> and English Calvinists responded by participating in international Reformed condemnation of the movement through the Synod of Dort, to which they presented a petition in 1619.<sup>2</sup> There was a turn-about under Charles I and Archbishop Laud who patronised opponents of double predestination, and a further reversal with the Long Parliament and the defeat of the King's policy. After the dominance of the Arminian faction under Laud, the Westminster Assembly, convened in 1643, re-established the theology of double predestination as the official teaching of the Church of England, but its position had been shaken and its Calvinism tempered as a result. Arminian objections to the decree of reprobation had increased awareness of the problem of Calvinist despair, but in spite of attempts at sensitivity, official statements of faith such as the Synod of Dort and the Westminster Assembly clung to the essential tenets of double predestination, even as they struggled with its inherent contradictions. Both these documents were to remain important to experimental Calvinists, and the Westminster *Confession of Faith* was to form the basis of the Congregationalist Savoy Declaration of 1658.

Part of the Calvinist response to Arminianism had been a renewed emphasis on preparation, but that in turn led to further controversy over the relationship between works and grace with the emergence

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<sup>1</sup> For accounts of Arminianism and Calvinism during this period, see Wallace, pp. 79-111; A. W. Harrison, *Arminianism* (London: Duckworth, 1937), pp.122-56; Godfrey Davies, 'Arminian versus Puritan in England, ca. 1620 – 1640', *Huntingdon Library Bulletin* 5 (1934), 157-179; Nicolas Tyacke, 'Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Revolution', in *The Origins of the English Civil War*, ed. by Conrad Russell, (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 119-143.

<sup>2</sup> The Synod of Dort was convened in November 1618, with the encouragement of James I and with the participation of an official English delegation, in order to respond to and condemn Arminian 'error'. It resulted in a statement of the theology of double predestination that was to remain important to later Calvinists. See, for example, Richard Baxter, 'Preface', *The Grotian Religion* (Kedermister [sic]: N. Simmons, 1658). (The pagination is inconsistent: the preface begins on 'p. 2' but closes on sig. C7<sup>r</sup>, although sig. A does not commence until a couple of pages into the preface, and the main text starts again on p. 1.) The English delegation had presented a petition to the Dutch Synod; it was originally delivered on March 6<sup>th</sup> 1619 and published in 1629 as *The Collegiat Suffrage of the Divines of Great Britaine, Concerning the Five Articles Controverted in the Low Countries* (London: Robert Milbourne, 1629).

of Antinomianism in the 1630s, which eschewed works and preparation as mere moralism.<sup>3</sup> In *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525-1695*, Dewey D. Wallace argues that Antinomianism produced a reaction in its adversaries disproportionate to its own strength, and that it furthered the separatism of what he terms 'high Calvinism' from more moderate forms:

For Anglican opponents of the Puritan and Cromwellian leadership it served as an example of where Calvinism and Puritanism led, whereas to Puritan defenders of the establishment it was a convenient whipping boy whereby to indicate one's commitment to and the desperate urgency of creating an orderly society, as well as an apologetic means to disavow those more extreme possibilities which Anglicans claimed to be endemic to Puritanism...The Antinomian crisis and controversy acted as a catalyst in the forming of theological parties, on the one hand driving a wedge between moderate Calvinists who abhorred them and high Calvinists who found them incautious allies and, on the other hand, further alienating Arminian Anglicans from all Calvinists.<sup>4</sup>

Antinomianism had a formative influence upon the emergence of separate strands of Calvinism, and, in the case of Congregationalists and Particular Baptists, their distinctive minority identity was in turn to have a significant impact upon how its members might conceive of themselves as the elect.

The Arminian and Antinomian controversies rumbled on, and kept alive anxieties over the seeming injustice of the decree of reprobation, and the relationship between works and grace. The doctrine of preparation became highly charged as a result, as Calvinists sought to reconcile themselves to Arminian objections, without tipping too far into moralism at the expense of grace – the Antinomian concern. That heightened tension between works and grace, preparation and predestination, was to be played out in experimental Calvinist attitudes towards the reading and writing of salvation. Anxiety over human agency shadowed attempts to reconcile hermeneutic and experiential reading of the Word, and undermined the efforts of autobiographers to write themselves into narratives of conversion.

Calvinism itself began to bifurcate: the growth of a more moderate emphasis, often (though not always accurately) identified with Presbyterianism, was matched by the increasing rigidity and

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<sup>3</sup> The origins of antinomianism are identified with John Eaton, whose book *The Honey-Combe of Free Justification by Christ Alone* was published posthumously in 1642. John Eaton, *The Honey-Combe of Free Justification by Christ Alone* (London: Robert Lancaster, 1642). Based largely on Luther's *Commentary on Galatians*, Eaton reasserted the Lutheran emphasis on grace and condemned any reliance on sanctification as an evidence of salvation; assurance could only derive from a true faith in the saving power of Christ. Other figures associated with Antinomianism include John Saltmarsh and William Eyre; the respective titles of their works *Free Grace: or the Flowings of Christ's Blood Freely to Sinners* (London: [n.pub.], 1645) and *Justification Without Conditions* (London: [n.pub.] 1653) make clear their concerns. Those who stress its origins as a response to the doctrine of preparation include Perry Miller, *The New England Mind* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), pp. 59-61, and Petit, *Heart Prepared*, pp. 125-127.



separatism of the Congregationalists and Particular Baptists. However, as will be seen in this and subsequent chapters, a strict adherence to the theology of double predestination can be found among members of all three groups, while the ejection of many Presbyterians from the Church of England after the Restoration imposed the common identity of dissenter upon them. The difficulty in defining clear sectarian boundaries during this period is in itself an indication that double predestination continued to unsettle Calvinists of all persuasions. Most significantly for the purposes of this enquiry, Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Particular Baptists shared an ongoing anxiety over salvation in a context of religious marginalisation that found expression in tension between two models of reading the Word, hermeneutic and experiential. In different ways and forms, reflecting the variances in their backgrounds, these groups exploited life-writing as a means of redressing their anxiety of reading salvation. The growth of Presbyterianism, Congregationalism and Particular Baptism, and the ecclesiological and theological connections and differences between these groups are the subject of this chapter. It begins by tracing the origins of their ideas on church government in relation to the discernment of salvation, and then proceeds to examine how their articulations of double predestination had altered since the reformed theology of Calvin and Perkins. It examines the continuing theological wrangles that resulted in even more punitive articulations of reprobation, and considers how the anxiety they generated was mediated to a wider readership through sermons and works of practical piety. Such works expose the ongoing tension between preparation and predestination that was formative of the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading and writing salvation.

### The Emergence of Presbyterianism 1640 – 1660

English Presbyterianism is the term that has become associated with what was in fact a broad range of ecclesiological opinion and theological belief. George R. Abernathy has remarked that

English Presbyterianism varied so much from individual to individual that it defies precise and universal definition... In a sense it was a residuum of an older puritanism

and Roger Thomas has noted that the only point of consistence among this heterogeneous group was the belief that Puritan discipline should be based on parish autonomy.<sup>5</sup> English Presbyterianism had

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<sup>4</sup> Wallace, pp. 113, 120.

<sup>5</sup> George R. Abernathy, 'The English Presbyterians and the Stuart Restoration, 1648 – 1663', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 55, Part Two (1965), , 1-101 (p. 3); Roger Thomas, 'The Rise of the Reconcilers', in *The English Presbyterians from Elizabethan Puritanism to Modern Unitarianism*, ed. by C.G. Bolam, Jeremy Goring, H.L. Short, Roger Thomas (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1968), pp. 46 – 72 (p.47).



roots that went as far back as the 1570s<sup>6</sup>, but it did not fully burst on to the scene until the collapse of censorship in 1640, and the publication of vast numbers of books and pamphlets that brought issues of church government into public debate.<sup>7</sup> Essentially it represented a move away from episcopacy and synodical authority (considered to be without scriptural foundation) towards the notion that the essential unit of government lay with each particular church or presbytery. Beyond that, there might be a graduated scale of classes or conferences, but it did not embrace the Scottish model of presbyterial government, insisting always on the sovereign independence of individual congregations. It found official definition and endorsement in the Westminster Assembly of 1643, which, while it superficially suggested a structure of ecclesiastical government similar to that in Scotland, unlike that system made no attempt to assert the notion that particular congregations were bound to submit to higher bodies.<sup>8</sup> A national structure was never actually erected, the Presbyterian majority in parliament being overthrown in 1648. While it remained on the statute books, between 1654 and 1660 there was in fact a wide variety of religious practice, and the Restoration and the Act of Uniformity in 1662 were to see its further marginalisation.<sup>9</sup>

Theologically English Presbyterianism encompassed a range of Calvinist belief: although often associated with ‘reconciling’ moderation and Baxterian rationalism, in fact, in the period up until 1689 (the year of the Toleration Act and the necessary boundary to this investigation) there were many, such as George Kendal, Stephen Charnock, and Samuel Annesley and his associates, who clung to stricter formulations of double predestination and who rejected what they perceived as moralist and rationalist tendencies.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, while their theological discourse tended to be more temperate than that of the Congregationalists and Particular Baptists, their works of practical piety, as will be seen, were often every bit as zealous in their enunciation of double predestination.

English Presbyterians and Independents were alike in vesting authority in particular congregations rather than in a more extended hierarchical structure of church government, but in one key respect they differed. Whereas Presbyterians felt that such congregations should be open to all, Congregationalists and Particular Baptists based their notion of ‘gathered’ churches on a visible elect: prospective entrants had to deliver testimonies of conversion for the assessment of existing members

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<sup>6</sup> Its inception is commonly associated with Thomas Cartwright, and his lectures on *Acts* delivered at Cambridge in 1570. Bolam and others, p. 31.

<sup>7</sup> Bolam and others, p. 34.

<sup>8</sup> *The Confession of Faith and Catechisms Agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster* (London: Robert Bostock, 1649), pp. 47-48.

<sup>9</sup> For more detailed accounts of the emergence of English Presbyterianism, see Bolam and others, and Abernathy.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, George Kendall, *A Vindication of the Doctrine Commonly Received in the Reformed Churches concerning Gods Intentions of Special Grace and Favour to his Elect in the Death of Christ* (London: [n.pub.] 1653); Stephen Charnock, *The Works of the Late Learned Divine Stephen Charnock, B.D.*, 2 vols. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Ben Griffin, 1699), especially 2: 1-169, 180-181.



before they might be admitted. This fundamental difference not only altered the ways in which Presbyterians and members of separatist churches experienced double predestination; it was also to have a formative impact on the kinds of life-writing each adopted. Furthermore, the disagreement was based on a difference of opinion about the readability of spiritual status: while both accepted that salvation was clear only to God, the ecclesiology of the latter seemed to conflict with that stance. In order to explore these differences further, and the implications of them for the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading salvation, it is necessary to consider at more length the emergence of gathered churches.

### The Emergence of Congregationalism 1640 - 1660

The term 'Congregationalism' probably made its first appearance in 1641 in the epistle to *A Glimpse of Sion's Glory* by William Kiffin, who was a member of Henry Jessey's church.<sup>11</sup> However, its roots went back further to William Ames, John Cotton, the Independent church in Rotterdam, and the dissenting brethren of the Westminster Assembly.<sup>12</sup> Other Englishmen who became members of the Rotterdam church were William Bridge, Jeremiah Burroughes and Sidrach Simpson; Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye gathered an associated church at Arnhem. There were differences of opinion among them, particularly over the degree of separatism desirable, but all five were to be influential on their return, establishing their own congregations in England<sup>13</sup>. Together they signed the *Apologeticall Narration* (1643)<sup>14</sup> that stated their concurrence with the doctrine of the Westminster Assembly and explained their ecclesiological differences, and (with the exception of Burroughes who died in 1646) *The Reasons Presented by the Dissenting Brethren against Certain propositions concerning Presbyteriall government* (1648). In 1658 Nye, Goodwin and Bridge were to attend the Savoy Conference that resulted in the definitive articles of faith for Congregationalism.<sup>15</sup>

John Cotton was not only influential in the establishment of the original Rotterdam church, but was also to have a more direct impact upon some of its members. When en route to New England in

<sup>11</sup> Geoffrey Nuttall, *Visible Saints: The Congregational Way 1640-1660* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), p. vii.

<sup>12</sup> According to the Minister Hugh Peter, Ames had left his Professorship in Friesland to work with him "because of my Churches Independency at Rotterdam". Hugh Peter, *Mr Peter's Last Report* (London: n. pub, 1646), p. 14. On the connection between Hugh Peter, Goodwin and John Cotton, see Nuttall, *Visible Saints*, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Bridge gathered a church in Great Yarmouth in Norfolk; Burroughes became Morning Lecturer at Stepney in Middlesex; Simpson set up a Congregational church in London and was also Master of Pembroke Hall in Cambridge; Goodwin became Minister of Congregational churches in St Dunstan-in-the-East, London and Oxford, and became President of Magdalen College in Oxford; and Nye was Minister to Congregational churches in Acton in Middlesex and in London. *Dictionary of National Biography*, 22 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), II, 1223-1223; III, 445-447; XVIII, 277-278; VIII, 148-150; XIV, 724-727. [Hereafter referred to as *DNB*.]

<sup>14</sup> *An Apologeticall Narration, Humbly Submitted to the Honourable Houses of Parliament* (London: Robert Dawlman, 1643).



1633 he met both Goodwin and Nye in London, and they were to contribute an epistle to his book *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* (1644) in which they recommended its “Middle-way... between that which is called Brownisme, and the Presbyteriall-govemment ...(which in our Apologie we did in the generall intimate and intend).”<sup>16</sup> That work was in turn to have a strong impact upon John Owen who was to become the leading figure in English Congregationalism. In his *Review of the true Nature of Schisme* (1657), Owen wrote that

In the pursuit and management of this work, quite besides, and contrary to my expectation, at a time, and season wherein I could expect nothing on that account but *ruine* in this world, without the knowledge or advice of, or conference with any one person of that judgment, I was prevailed on to receive that and those *principles* which I had thought to have set myself in an opposition unto.<sup>17</sup>

He later published *A defence of Mr. John Cotton* against the Presbyterian Daniel Cawdrey in 1658, and was to work in close collaboration with Goodwin, Nye and Simpson while in Oxford<sup>18</sup>. This circle was for a while to have considerable public influence, preaching frequently to the Rump Parliament and contributing to a number of schemes for a church settlement under Oliver Cromwell.<sup>19</sup> With the demise of Cromwell, Owen’s influence centred upon the emerging Congregationalists, whom he steered towards the Savoy Declaration in 1658 that encoded their commitment to what they considered ‘orthodox’ Calvinism. He dominated expositions of experimental Calvinist theology, not only through his own writings but also through the many prefaces he wrote endorsing the work of others.<sup>20</sup>

Owen was also important in articulating the founding principles of Congregationalism that were to have a formative impact upon the use of conversion narrative as a strategy for living with double predestination. In 1648 he published *Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan; brought to the Borders, for the encouragement of the Saints, travelling thitherward, with their faces towards Syon, or Rules of Direction, for the walking of Saints in fellowship, according to the order of the Gospel*. In it he stated a number of “Rules” that he had collected for the benefit of the church at Coggeshall of which he was Pastor.<sup>21</sup> Rule One stated the principle of fellowship, by which church members should

<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed account of the early beginnings of Congregationalism, see Nuttall, *Visible Saints*, pp. 11-14.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, ‘To the Reader’, in John Cotton, *The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* (Oxford: Thomas Robinson, 1657), sig. A4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> John Owen, *A Review of the true Nature of Schisme* (Oxford: Thomas Robinson, 1657), pp. 35-36.

<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of Cotton’s influence upon Owen see Nuttall, *Visible Saints*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>19</sup> Wallace, p. 149.

<sup>20</sup> For example, Owen contributed prefaces to the following (among others): William Bridge, *The Freeness of the Grace and Love of God to Believers* (London: Nath. Crouch, 1671); Samuel Petto, *The Difference between the Old and New Covenant* (London: [n.pub.], 1674); Bartholomew Ashwood, *The Best Treasure* (London: William Marshal, 1681).

<sup>21</sup> John Owen, *Eshcol: A Cluster of the Fruit of Canaan; brought to the Borders, for the encouragement of the Saints, travelling thitherward, with their faces towards Syon, or Rules of Direction, for the walking of Saints in fellowship, according to the order of the Gospel* (London: Philemon Stephens, 1648), title page.



bear "Affectionate love in all things to one another, like that which Christ bore to his church."<sup>22</sup> Owen's notion of fellowship was similar to that expressed by William Bartlet in *A Model of the Congregational Way*, published a year earlier, in which Bartlet stated that the

visible Church-state, Order, and Politie which Jesus Christ onely hath instituted and ordained under the New Testament... is a free society or communion of visible Saints, embodied and knit together by a voluntary consent, to worship God, according to his Word, making up one ordinary congregation, with power of Government within it selfe onely.<sup>23</sup>

The church-books of gathered congregations reiterated the founding principle of fellowship in their covenants, as for example that which recorded the embodiment of the Axminster church:

Voluntarily giving up themselves to the Lord, & to each other by the will of God, solemnly Covenanting and engaging to walk together in a due and faithfull attendance upon the Lord Jesus Christ in all his Ordinances and Appointments...so were embodied and Constituted a Church of Christ.<sup>24</sup>

The principle of fellowship among 'visible saints' was a means of shoring up the identity of the elect. However, just as earlier Calvinists had needed reprobation to underpin election, wrath to define grace, so that notion of fellowship was bounded and defined by a concept of separation that was a logical application of the theology of double predestination. Rule Five of Owen's *Eshcol* set out the principle of

Separation and Sequestration from the world and men of the world, with alwayes of false worship, untill we be apparently a people dwelling alone, not wicked among the Nations.<sup>25</sup>

A subtle interplay between these notions of fellowship and separation was to be central to the production and reception of conversion narratives. They had a more immediate impact on lay members than the ongoing theological disputes that characterised experimental Calvinism before and after the Restoration.

Congregationalism had been developing during the 1640s and 1650s, and it found definition in the *Savoy Declaration* of 1658. Approximately one hundred and twenty churches were represented at the

<sup>22</sup> Owen, *Eshcol*, pp. 26-7.

<sup>23</sup> William Bartlet *A Model of the Congregational Way* (London: H. Overton, 1647), p. 30.

<sup>24</sup> *Axminster Ecclesiastica*, (Axminster: [n.pub] 1874), p.13. For a discussion of the written covenants of gathered churches, and the concept of 'embodiment', see Nuttall, pp.74-81 and *Some Early Nonconformist Church Books*, ed. by H.G. Tibbutt (Ampthill: Bedfordshire Historical Record Society, 1972). Chapter five considers the implications of 'embodiment' for the 'reading' of members as 'living copy'. Chapter five, p. 148.

<sup>25</sup> Owen, *Eshcol*, p. 49.



meeting that took place between 29<sup>th</sup> September until the 12<sup>th</sup> October 1658. It did not command the approval of all the Independents<sup>26</sup>, but it remained a measure of correct doctrine for the majority even after the Restoration and in an altered climate of persecution. It was based on the Westminster Assembly, as it had been amended by Parliament in 1647-8; the most substantial changes were with chapters fifteen and twenty on the Word and the Holy Spirit, and in the closing 'Institution of Churches' which distinguished it from Presbyterianism. The *Declaration* upheld "the manifestation of the glory of his mercy in the eternal salvation of the elect, and of his justice in the damnation of the reprobate, who are wicked and disobedient"<sup>27</sup> as the basis for the gathering of visible churches of the regenerate.

The gathering or 'embodiment' of separatist churches was conducted by means of oral testimonies of conversion from prospective members. By 1658 the practice of delivering a verbal relation of one's conversion on entry to a congregation was well established<sup>28</sup>, and the Savoy *Declaration* was clear in its requirement of a confession of conversion and faith from those seeking to become a member of a 'gathered' church:

The members of these churches are saints by calling, visibly manifesting and evidencing (in and by their profession and walking) their obedience unto that call of Christ; who, being further known to each other by their confession of the faith wrought in them by the power of God, declared by themselves or otherwise manifested, do willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ.<sup>29</sup>

A confession of faith did not always guarantee life-long sainthood, and the *Declaration* made provision for "admonition" and "excommunication" of the wayward. The possibility of excommunication was not, however, a contradiction of the doctrine of perseverance, but rather an admission that the judgement of those hearing the testimonies of conversion could be mistaken. John Cotton observed in *Of the Holinesse of Church Members* (1650) that "We receive none but such as (according to the judgement of charitable Christians) may be conceived to be regenerate".<sup>30</sup> Charitable conception was not quite the same as indisputable knowledge, a view evidently shared by the *Savoy Declaration* which was mindful of "our brethren in New England."<sup>31</sup> While Congregationalists tried to qualify the theology behind their ecclesiology, nonetheless anxieties

<sup>26</sup> See Nuttall, *Visible Saints*, p. 18-19.

<sup>27</sup> *Savoy Declaration*, p. 22. A.G. Matthews observes that after the first edition was published in 1658, four more editions were published the following year. He estimates that at least 5,000 copies had been sold, or were on sale, by the end of 1659. Another edition appeared in 1688. A.G. Matthews, 'Introduction' to *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order 1658* (London: Independent Press Ltd, 1959), pp. 40-41.

<sup>28</sup> On the origins of conversion testimonies, see chapter five, pp.142-143.

<sup>29</sup> *Savoy Declaration*, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> John Cotton, *Of the Holinesse of Church Members* (London: Hanna Allen, 1650), p. 43.

<sup>31</sup> Owen, 'Preface', *Savoy Declaration*, sig. B2<sup>v</sup>.



surrounding the orthodoxy that no man should judge another's spiritual status continued to be a major point of division between Independents and Presbyterians.<sup>32</sup> Its pertinence to the development of the conversion narrative as a strategy for ameliorating doubt of election will be considered in chapter five.

The *Savoy Declaration* also subscribed to the affective reading of the Word as the primary route towards salvation, but placed even greater emphasis upon the workings of the Spirit :

Although the gospel be the only outward means of revealing Christ and saving grace, and is as such abundantly sufficient thereunto; yet that men who are dead in trespasses, maybe born again, quickened or regenerated, there is moreover necessary an effectual, irresistable work of the Holy Ghost upon the whole soul, for the producing in them a new spiritual life, without which no other means are sufficient for their conversion unto God.<sup>33</sup>

The relationship between reading, the 'effectual' work of the Spirit, and conversion, will be considered in the following chapter.

The growth of Congregationalism, culminating in the *Savoy Declaration* of 1658, created a significantly altered context for the theology of double predestination. The principles of fellowship and separation shored up a communal identity of the elect; however, the gathered churches also intensified the practice of self-examination and its journey into narrative through their insistence on conversion testimonies as the criteria for entry. Thus Congregationalism provided a structure for overcoming anxiety over one's election that involved both introspection and communication (the building blocks of autobiography) and offered the charitable judgement of the elders as a surrogate for the inscrutable will of the experimental Calvinist God. Human judgement, however, remained fallible, and cases of admonition and excommunication served as a reminder of the continued necessity of 'walking in godly conversation.'

The principles stated in the *Savoy Declaration* of 1658 persisted throughout the decades of the Restoration in spite of radically altered political circumstances. Much of the *Declaration* (differences on Baptism apart) was also adopted by the Particular Baptists in their *Confession of Faith* of 1677, who claimed they had "no itch to clogge Religion with new words". Their *Confession* reasserted the doctrines of temporary faith and ineffectual calling, and in a manner by now familiar, argued that while true believers might have their assurance "shaken, diminished and intermitted" yet they were always "preserved from utter despair." The doctrine of perseverance was upheld, as was that of

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<sup>32</sup> For discussion of the controversy between Congregationalists and Presbyterians, see Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 81-116.



preparation: it was “the duty of everyone, to give all diligence to make their calling and election sure”.<sup>34</sup> However, while the theology of double predestination remained in essence the same, there were to be shifts in emphasis in response to the persecution of nonconformists instigated by the Restoration.

### The Political Context of Experimental Calvinism after the Restoration 1660-89

The years leading up to the Restoration saw the development of Presbyterianism within the state church, and the growth of Independent Congregationalism and Particular Baptism in a climate of toleration. With the Restoration came the ejection of Presbyterian ministers, marginalisation of the theology of double predestination, and varying degrees of religious persecution up until the Toleration Act of 1689. This further honed the predestinarianism of experimental Calvinists and forced them into a common identity as nonconformists.

The re-established Church of England was essentially aligned with an Arminian rejection of the theology of double predestination. In 1660 the *Act of Uniformity* (14 Car.II, cap.4) stated that “nothing conduceth more to the settling the peace of this nation...than a universal agreement in the public worship of Almighty God”. It imposed the sole validity of the revised Prayer book, to which clergy had to declare their assent, and effectively debarred ministers who would not conform to the restored episcopal church;<sup>35</sup> estimates vary, but between 1660-1662 approximately 1, 909 ministers were ejected in England, and a further 120 in Wales.<sup>36</sup> Most of these, however, were of Presbyterian inclination; Congregationalists and Particular Baptists had never been part of the state church, and so could not be removed from it. Their objections to a national church were based primarily on their belief that a church could only be made up of ‘visible saints’; the established church failed to distinguish between the regenerate and unregenerate. Implicated in the ecclesiological differences, the theology of double predestination remained at the heart of issues of dissent. Importantly, Presbyterian exclusion focused not only on structures of church government, but also on the question of adherence to a prayer book that was regarded as introducing an improper formalism to one’s relationship with scripture. (The importance, and nature, of an experiential relationship with the Word to both Presbyterians and Independents are discussed in the following chapter).

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<sup>33</sup> *Savoy Declaration*, p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> *A Confession of Faith Put Forth by the Elders and Brethren Of many Congregations of Christians (baptised upon Profession of their faith) in London and the Country* (London: Benjamin Harris, 1677), pp. 59, 39, 61, 56, 61.

<sup>35</sup> *The Statutes of the Realm*, ed. by A. Luders and T. Edlyn Tomlins, 12 vols (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1810-28), V, 364-370. [Hereafter referred to as *Statutes*.]

<sup>36</sup> A.G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), pp. xii-xiv.



In spite of their differences with the Church of England over church government and the prayer book, throughout the period between 1660-1689 Presbyterians still aspired to inclusion within a state church, and so their Calvinism was tempered by an engagement with the dominant cultural trends.<sup>37</sup> That aspiration distinguished them from the separatism of the Congregationalists and Particular Baptists which, in their case, further rigidified statements of election and reprobation and codified conversion. As in the years previous to the Reformation, there were individual exceptions to these broad party allegiances. There continued to be many Presbyterians (and even Anglicans) who adhered to strict Calvinism in both doctrine and tone<sup>38</sup>, while Baptist groups were divided between the Arminian General Baptists and the staunchly Calvinist Particular Baptists. Alongside these variances, persecution of nonconformity imposed a common identity, even as Presbyterian and Independent dissenters struggled to reconcile their differences.<sup>39</sup> Shifts in legislature, the degrees to which it was implemented, and the constraints it imposed upon publishing, have been considered by others, and it is beyond the scope of this investigation to further their discussions.<sup>40</sup> In general,

<sup>37</sup> On Presbyterian engagement with more general cultural shifts, see Wallace, pp. 158-159. For differing views see Robert S. Bosher, *The Making of the Restoration Settlement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), p. 278-9; and I.M. Green, *The Re-establishment of the Church of England 1660-1663* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 22-24.

<sup>38</sup> For example, strict Calvinist Anglicans included George Morley and Thomas Barlow; strict Calvinist Presbyterians included Samuel Annesley and Stephen Charnock. On George Morley and Thomas Barlow, see Wallace, pp. 149, 159, 163, 233, 235. On Charnock, see footnote 10 above.

<sup>39</sup> Baxter and Owen were both prominent in attempts to bring about unity between Presbyterians and Independents, but this was not to be achieved until the 'Happy Union' of 1690. See Bolam and others, pp. 93-102, and also Abernathy, pp. 8-17.

<sup>40</sup> Briefly, in addition to the Act of Uniformity, the Restoration had also reinstated earlier legislation as an apparatus for the penalisation of Nonconformity. The *Elizabethan Act of Uniformity* (1 Eliz. Cap.2) [*Statutes*, IV.pt.1, 355-358] and the *Jacobean Act against Popish Recusants* (3 Jac.1, cap.4) [*Statutes*, IV.pt.2, 1071] meant absentees from Sunday worship at parish church could be fined. More severely, the *Elizabethan Act Against Conventicles* (35 Eliz. Cap.1 *An Act for Retaining the Queen's Subjects in their Due Obedience*) allowed the exile or death of those who still refused to conform after three months imprisonment. (Bunyan was imprisoned under this Act in November 1660.) December 1662 saw Charles II's *First Declaration of Indulgence*, but it was overruled by parliament. Thus in addition to the resuscitation of previous laws, new statutes were imposed that became known collectively as the 'Clarendon Code'. 1664 introduced the *First Conventicle Act* (16 Car.II, cap.4). It forbade all religious meetings of five or more people that did not adhere to the established church liturgy; a first offence brought a fine of five pounds or three months imprisonment, a second ten pounds or six months, and a third one hundred pounds or transportation. [*Statutes*, V, 517-518] In 1665, the *Act for Restraining Nonconformists from Inhabiting Corporations* (the 'Five Mile Act') (17 Car.II.c.2) was directed against Ministers, who were forbidden to come within five miles of any place where they had ministered without taking the 'Oxford Oath', a declaration of non-resistance against king and government. Offenders were fined £40, of which a third went to the crown, a third to the poor of the parish in which the offence was committed, and, more invidiously, a third to the informer. [*Statutes*, V, 575] The tactic of encouraging informants was continued in the *Second Conventicle Act* of 1670 (22 Car.II, Cap.1). Fines for those attending meetings were reduced (a first offence brought a fine of five shillings, with ten shillings for subsequent offences), while Ministers were obliged to pay twenty pounds (forty on subsequent occasions) and owners of meeting places twenty pounds. However, Justices were now empowered to forcibly enter into people's homes, and "notorious evidence and circumstance of fact" were now sufficient to secure conviction. Furthermore, fines of five pounds could be imposed on any who omitted to inform, and of one hundred pounds on Justices who failed to prosecute. [*Statutes*, V, 648-651] In 1672 Charles II issued his *Second Declaration of Indulgence*, it allowed Nonconformists to worship publicly under licensed conditions, but was withdrawn in March the following year through parliamentary pressure. After his succession to the throne, James II issued a *General Pardon* to all imprisoned for matters of conscience, and his *First Declaration of Indulgence* in April 1687. This suspended all ecclesiastical penal laws, and provided freedom of worship for both Nonconformists and Roman Catholics. There was another purging of corporations, and a *Second Declaration of Indulgence* in April 1688. [Andrew Browning, ed, *English Historical Documents 1660-1714* (1967) pp. 298-300.] However, by this time the pro-catholic maneuverings of James were fostering more complex alliances between Protestants of all persuasions. The flight of James and accession of William and Mary diminished the threat of Catholicism, and secured a limited toleration by means of the *Act for Exempting their Majesties' Protestant Subjects Dissenting from the Church of England from the Penalties of Certain Laws*. (1.W & M. c.18) [*Statutes*, VI, 74 - 75.] Places of worship needed to be registered with bishops, and their doors had to remain unbolted during meetings; people attending such meetings had to subscribe to the Oaths of Allegiance



however, persecution meant that anxiety over one's election was inevitably welded to more temporal concerns, as evoked by N.H. Keeble in *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity*:

Daily life presented itself as a series of queries, quandaries and challenges: whether or not to conform, to attend a meeting, to take precautionary measures, to trust a stranger; how to respond to requests for information, to official interrogation, to legal proceedings; and above all, how to endure material deprivation, destitution and impoverishment. Behind all these might lurk a larger, nagging question; was to consider them at all evidence of weakness, of compromise, of want of faith?<sup>41</sup>

Whereas the small immutable number of the elect had troubled Perkins, it became a mainstay to the beleaguered gathered churches, whose principles of fellowship and separation were both tested and endorsed by this climate of persecution. Intolerance and censorship reinforced the minority identity of the experimental Calvinist, made writing and reading potentially subversive, and characterised the theology of double predestination as dissent. Experimental Calvinist theologians resisted that appellation, but in the process distilled the punitive aspects of their theology still further.

Presbyterians and Independents were united by their nonconformity to prayer book and episcopacy, even though they were divided by the notion of separatist gathered churches. They were also united by a persistent adherence to the theology of double predestination: while Presbyterians are often considered to have been more moderate in their belief, in fact there was a degree of variation across the sectarian spectrum. That range can be traced across three related areas of discourse: theological works, sermons and practical piety. The latter two were to be most influential in disseminating the theology to a lay audience, and in perpetuating the anxiety of reading salvation among the experimental Calvinist community of readers.

### Experimental Calvinist Theology

Experimental Calvinism was rooted in reformed theology but it was also coloured by continuing Arminian and Antinomian disputes and the growth of moderate Calvinism. Attitudes towards Antinomianism were to be one of the dividing factors between moderate and stricter Calvinists. Moralism was now perceived to be the chief threat by the latter, for whom double predestination needed more than ever to be protected and guaranteed by a firm privileging of grace above works;

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and Supremacy and the Oath against Transubstantiation; and nonconformist Clergy had to subscribe to thirty-four of the Thirty-Nine Articles. For further discussion of the persecution of nonconformists, see, for example, G.R. Cragg, *Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957); N.H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987); Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution*, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978). On the impact of censorship upon nonconformist publishing, see Keeble, *Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, pp. 93-126.

<sup>41</sup> Keeble, *Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, p. 50.



they were less wary than many moderates of Antinomian excesses. The split with the moderates over the related issues thrown up by Arminian and Antinomian debates furthered the growing isolation and consequent rigidification of separatist theology, and made more charged the relationship between reason and affection (or hermeneutic and experiential reading) for all experimental Calvinists.

Owen wrote copiously against what he regarded as “the Arminian idoll of free-will”.<sup>42</sup> He came to regard it as a ‘Socinian’ denial that Christ’s death was the source of effective grace, and that led to a retaliatory emphasis on Christ feeling the exact suffering due to the sinners for whom he made satisfaction.<sup>43</sup> Owen’s graphic and exhaustive treatment of Christ’s sufferings produced a tension typical of Calvinist paradox; it intensified guilt even as it proved the extent of God’s grace. The increased focus on the saving power of Christ among experimental Calvinists is illustrated by Bunyan’s *Mapp Shewing the Order and Causes of Salvation and Damnation*, that (as argued by Gordon Campbell) derives from Perkins’ ‘Map of the Causes of Salvation and Damnation’ in *A Golden Chaine*. Campbell points out that although Bunyan believed in the Trinity, unlike Perkins who put God in the centre of the triangle, Bunyan placed Christ there – a “gaffe” that reveals the extreme emphasis later Calvinists placed upon the saving power of the son.<sup>44</sup> Just as the focus on the satisfaction of Christ was engendered by a need to uphold God’s grace in the face of moralism, so that led to a renewed emphasis on the workings of the Holy Spirit over and above the value of good works.<sup>45</sup> That was to be of key importance to notions of experiential reading as the work of preparation, and will be discussed in the following chapter.

Another important response to the Arminian erosion of God’s omniscience and omnipotence was a renewed emphasis on supralapsarianism and an attendant stress on the horrors awaiting the reprobate that stirred up the old anxieties more moderate Calvinists wished to assuage. The binary dynamic of Calvinism was made more inflexible by widespread defection from double predestination; threatened with marginalisation, there was now a more punitive incentive behind articulations of the decree of Reprobation. In his *Dissertation on Divine Justice* (c.1648) Owen made no bones about “the efficacy

<sup>42</sup> John Owen, *A Display of Arminianisme* (London: Phil. Stephens, 1643), p. 23.

<sup>43</sup> John Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae or, The Mystery of the Gospell Vindicated, and Socinianisme Examined* (Oxford: Tho. Robinson, 1655), pp. 464-635. Owen also focuses on the suffering and the saving power of Christ in the following works: *Salus Electorum, Sanguis Jesu; or, the Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (London: P. Stephens, 1648); *A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ, God and Man* (London, [n.pub.], 1679); *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ, in His Person, Office and Grace* (London: Benjamin Alsop, 1684).

<sup>44</sup> See p. 89 for a reproduction of Bunyan’s *A Mapp Shewing the Order and Causes of Salvation and Damnation*, and p. 55 for a reproduction of Perkins’ map. For Gordon Campbell’s argument that Bunyan’s map derives from that of Perkins, see ‘The Source of Bunyan’s “Mapp of Salvation”’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 44 (1981), 240-1, and Gordon Campbell, “Fishing in Other Men’s Waters: Bunyan and the Theologians”, in *John Bunyan Conventicle and Parnassus* ed. N.H. Keeble (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 141-146.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, John Owen, *Pneumatologia, Or a discourse concerning the Holy Spirit* (London: N. Ponder, 1674).



of the Divine anger”: God “gives equally clear signes and testimonies of his anger, severity, indignation, or of his *punitory justice*” in “this visible world” which “is appointed as the seat and abode of all kinds of misery, grief, lamentation, cares, wrath, vanity and inquietitude”.<sup>46</sup> Misfortune and unhappiness could be – *should* be – interpreted as signs of God’s wrath; the implications of this passage for the nervous Calvinist fearful of their salvation are obvious. Owen observed that

Even the most abandoned cannot but observe punishments of various kinds making havock every where in the world, and innumerable evils brooding, as it were, over the very texture of the universe.<sup>47</sup>

The need to ‘separate’ oneself from such a world into a fellowship of visible saints was urgent; indications that one might be unregenerate abundant. The readership of Owen’s *Dissertation on Divine Justice* might have been drawn from a limited section of society, but its message was conveyed to a wider and particularly susceptible audience through a catechism for children which was approved by Parliament in 1652.<sup>48</sup> Owen chose as its epigram a passage from Psalm 34: “Come ye Children, and hearken unto me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord”<sup>49</sup>: he then proceeded to do precisely that. He stressed the iniquity and sin of all mankind, reminded his young (and perhaps naughty) readers that “the way of the ungodly shall perish”, and concluded with the reminder that

all unbelievers and ungodly men shall be cast out into utter darknesse, with the Devil and his Angels, where there is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.<sup>50</sup>

Such writing would have inculcated an uncompromising Calvinism into the receptive imaginations of the children who recited it.

Owen was not unaware of the anxiety caused by the double nature of predestination. In a sermon preached before Parliament in 1649 that was published in 1650 as *The Steadfastness of Promises and the Sinfulness of Staggering*, he dwelt at length on the worries of the weak believer:

A poor creature looking upon the Promise sees, as he supposes, in a stedfast closing with the Promise, that there lyes presumption; on the other hand, certain destruction, if he believes not: and now he staggers, he is in a great straight: Arguments ariseth on both sides, he knows not how to determine them, and so hanging in suspense, he staggereth.

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<sup>46</sup> John Owen, *A Dissertation on Divine Justice* (London: J. Higham & J. Murgatroyd, [n.d.]), p.110. Wallace argues that it was published in 1648. Wallace, p. 151.

<sup>47</sup> Owen, *Divine Justice*, p. 111.

<sup>48</sup> John Owen, *The Primer: or, An easie way to teach Children the true reading of English, With a necessary catechisme, to instruct youth in the grounds of Christian Religion* (London: printed for the company of stationers, 1652).

<sup>49</sup> Owen, *Primer*, sig. A2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>50</sup> Owen, *Primer*, sigs A2<sup>v</sup>, C<sup>v</sup>.



Like a man travailing a Journey, and meeting with two several paths, that promise both fairly, and he knows not which is his proper way; he ghesse, and ghesse, and at length cryes, Well, I know not which of these wayes I should go, but this is certain, if I mistake I am undone, I'll go in neither, but here I'll sit down, and not move one step in either of them, until someone come, that can give me direction.<sup>51</sup>

Many were still unable to find the middle way between despair and complacency that had perplexed Calvinists for so long.

Owen's comment that the staggerer is "full of self-communication and is sad" is an acknowledgement of the introspection that was fostered by double predestination, and which was a generative force behind the production of autobiography. However, Owen was unable to use his insight into the anxieties of his flock to resolve them by anything other than condemnation: he declared his abhorrence at the failure to trust in the Word of God and his argument that "all this staggering is from unbelief" was unlikely to reassure those who knew only too well that salvation came only through a true and living faith<sup>52</sup>. His condemnation of unbelief may have made the risk of complacency less agonising, but would not have helped those who could not shake off their insecurity.

Owen was one of many experimental Calvinists to respond to Arminianism with a hardened insistence on the decree of reprobation, and some Presbyterians matched him in their zeal. Richard Resbury, for example, in a work entitled *Some Stop to the Gangrene of Arminianism* (1651), stated bluntly that "It is the eternal decree of God, whereby hee hath, meerly because he would, hated the rest of men" and cited scripture in proof of "his decree of hatred".<sup>53</sup> If experimental Calvinists such as Owen and Resbury responded to Arminian objections with a hardened insistence on the decree of reprobation, others were more alert to the distress that might cause among weak believers, and again, such sensitivity did not necessarily tally with what one might expect from sectarian backgrounds typically considered 'moderate' or 'extremist'. The Congregationalist Samuel Petto's *Voice of the Spirit* (1654), for example, addressed itself to the question "How a Soule may know whither it injoyeth the witnessings of the Spirit or not?"<sup>54</sup> and stressed the importance of preparation and "diligence" as a means of making one's "calling and Election sure".<sup>55</sup> His chapters exhaustively detailed the means whereby the "witnessings of the spirit" could be "attained, strengthened and preserved": his readers should "wait for the spirit"; "maintaine a perswasion that it is thy duty to

<sup>51</sup> John Owen, *The Steadfastness of Promises and the Sinfulness of Staggering* (London: Peter Cole, 1650), p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> Owen, *Steadfastness of Promises*, pp. 15, 54, 15.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Resbury, *Some Stop to the Gangrene of Arminianism* (London: John Wright, 1651), pp. 67, 68. Resbury was vicar at Oundle, Northamptonshire; he resigned six weeks before St. Bartholomew's Day, 1662. *DNB*, XVI, 918.

<sup>54</sup> Samuel Petto, *The Voice of the Spirit* (London: Livewell Chapman, 1654), sigs Q5<sup>r</sup> – Q8<sup>r</sup> (table of contents) and p. 63.

<sup>55</sup> Petto, 'The epistle dedicatory', *Voice of the Spirit*, sig. A2<sup>v</sup>.

seeke after them”; “Beware of those things that tend to keepe off from Assurance”; “Be much in self-examination”; “Be much in the observation of God’s dealings with your owne Soules”; “Be often renewing acts of faith”; “In all importunities with God for Assurance, make use of Arguments drawne from God himselfe”; and “Seeke for much inwarde acquaintaince with the written word”. He concluded with the advice to “Hold fast the doctrine of perseverance”, significantly regarding it as a source of assurance.<sup>56</sup> Petto valued the importance of self-examination as a means of attaining assurance:

Weake Christians ought to exercise themselves unto self-examination. Ergo, they are in a capacitie to attaine a knowledge of their state thereby. 2.Cor.13.5. *Examine your selves - - Prove yourselves - -* The ingemination of the exhortation, argueth it to be a duty of high concernment, else he would not use so much earnestness in exciting to it. And it is their station they are to enquire about. Whither they be in the faith. And whither Christ be in them or not.<sup>57</sup>

Petto’s attempt to resolve anxiety over salvation by integrating the active work of preparation into the passive reception of the Spirit was typical of experimental Calvinist reading of the Word. However, as is discussed in the following chapter, the endeavour was made fraught by the unresolved conflict between preparation and human agency, and predestination and divine omnipotence. That tension was to persist into autobiographical writing, which, as Petto implies, was a key means of preparation and self-examination: *The Voice of the Spirit* was intended as a prelude to an appended collection of conversion narratives entitled *Roses of Sharon*.

Anxiety over election continued to be the main charge against the defendants of double predestination in the formative years of experimental Calvinism, and they responded with harsh assertions of the arbitrariness of reprobation coupled with unstable attitudes towards anxiety over salvation which they both acknowledged and dismissed, understood and condemned. It is hard to tell whether this preoccupation with the problem of doubt over salvation was directly linked to the writers’ own encounters with lay despair (most of the theological writers were also ministers who would have had a pastoral relationship with their congregations), or whether the theological disputes had by now generated their own momentum. Both are probably true; the difficulty that Perkins had had in reconciling scholastic and pastoral discourses within *A Golden Chaine* had been accentuated by Arminian objections. Certainly, the problem of uncertainty over election continued to preoccupy Calvinists of all persuasions as well as their adversaries.

<sup>56</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, sigs Q5<sup>r</sup> – Q8<sup>r</sup>, pp. 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 186, 195.

<sup>57</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, p. 61.



Theological debate after the Restoration was preoccupied with issues of nonconformity, but while this tended to focus on ecclesiastical matters<sup>58</sup>, the doctrine of double predestination was also implicated in questions of dissent. There was continued wrangling over the relative value of good works and grace: two controversies in particular are revealing of the hardened defensiveness of the strict Calvinist position. Edward Fowler (who in 1662 chose not to conform but subsequently relented and eventually became Bishop of Gloucester) stressed the importance of moral renewal and complained at those who believed that human effort played no part in their salvation in *The Design of Christianity* (1671). He argued that “those that expect to have a share in the Salvation of the Gospel without true Holiness” and “Those that encourage themselves by the grace of the Gospel in their Unholiness” were “guilty of extreme sottishness”, and condemned those “that are never in their Element, but when they are talking of the Irrespectiveness of God’s Decrees, the Absoluteness of his Promises, the utter disability and perfect impotence of Natural men to do any thing towards their own conversion & c. and insist with greatest Emphasis and Vehemence upon such like false and dangerous opinions.”<sup>59</sup> He was countered by Bunyan in *A Defence of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith in Jesus Christ... Or, Mr Fowler’s Pretended Design of Christianity Proved to be Nothing More than to Trample under Foot the Blood of the Son of God; and the Idolizing of the Man’s Own Righteousness* (1672). Bunyan refuted Fowler’s moralism, arguing that it was

a horrible wickedness in you, thus to abuse the Law, and the weakness of man, by suggesting that the onely, the ultimate, or grand design of Christ Jesus was, or is, *the promoting of righteousness by the Law*, that is performed by humane principles in us.<sup>60</sup>

Significantly, in his conclusion he set Fowler’s assertions alongside three of the Thirty-Nine Articles, those on free-will, justification and works before justification, in order to prove the error of his opponent. In so doing Bunyan was asserting his own position as one not of dissent, but of allegiance to “the Fundamental truths of the Christian Religion” as expressed by the central document of the Church of England. Bunyan manipulated Fowler into a figure of rebellion, arguing that he himself sought to “contend for the truth continued, even in these very Articles of theirs, from which he hath so deeply revolted, that he clasheth with every one of them”.<sup>61</sup> A similar tactic was employed by Owen in response to Samuel Parker’s *A Discourse of Ecclesiastical Polity* (1670). Samuel Parker was Archdeacon of Canterbury (and later made Bishop of Oxford by James II). He asserted the Erastian principle that all should obey the religious policy of the government rather than disturb the peace: “Religion then is either useful or dangerous in a Common-wealth, as the temper of mind it

<sup>58</sup> Wallace, p. 162.

<sup>59</sup> Edward Fowler, *The Design of Christianity* (London, [n.pub.], 1671), pp. 213, 262.

<sup>60</sup> Bunyan, *A Defence of the Doctrine of Justification*, (London: Francis Smith, 1672), p. 17.

<sup>61</sup> Bunyan, *Doctrine of Justification*, p. 113.



breeds is peaceful or turbulent.” He criticised “the ungovernableness of the Principles and Tempers of some Sects” and argued that “To permit different sects of Religion in a Common-wealth is only, to keep up so many incurable Pretences and Occasions of Publick Disturbance. The Corrupt Passions and humours of men make Toleration infinitely unsafe.”<sup>62</sup> Owen argued that if one accepted Parker’s view one might as well reinstate the authority of the Pope; it was incumbent upon government to “discern aright which is the Church”: “They are to Nurse that which is committed to them, and not what themselves have framed, or begotten”.<sup>63</sup> He lamented the falling away from reformed theology:

A work of Reformation was carried on in the world, and succeeded in many places: in none more eminently, than in this Nation wherein we live... there are among many, such evident Declensions from the first established Reformation, towards the old or a new, and it may be worse Apostacy; such an apparent weariness of the principal Doctrines and practices, which enlivened the Reformation; as I cannot but be troubled at, and wherewith many are offended.<sup>64</sup>

In particular Owen refuted Parker’s moralism, insisting that virtue was no guarantee of saving grace. Above all he argued for “peace, patience and forbearance” towards those one might feel to be in error.<sup>65</sup>

Experimental Calvinists disputed the imposed identity of ‘dissenter’, but while their affirmations of continuity with earlier Calvinism hold true in terms of the key internal conflicts outlined in the previous chapter, nonetheless the very fact that they had to defend their position led to important shifts in emphasis that further affected the experimental Calvinist weak believer. Such a shift can be seen in *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant* (1674) by Samuel Petto (to which Owen contributed a preface).<sup>66</sup> Petto reasserted the superiority of grace over works, used Ramist tables

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<sup>62</sup> Samuel Parker, *A Discourse of Ecclesiastical Politie* (London: [n.pub.], 1670), pp. 145, 136.

<sup>63</sup> John Owen, *Truth and Innocence Vindicated in a Survey of a Discourse concerning Ecclesiastical Polity* (London: [n.pub.], 1669), pp. 157-8, 161. (The title pages of what appear to be the first editions give the dates of publication as 1669 for Owen’s and 1670 for Parker’s works, but *Truth and Innocence Vindicated* is clearly written in response to *A Discourse of Ecclesiastical Polity*.)

<sup>64</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence Vindicated*, pp. 394 - 95.

<sup>65</sup> Owen, *Truth and Innocence Vindicated*, pp. 223, 406, 408. Owen reiterated his adherence to ‘orthodox’ reformed theology in a counter-defence to Edward Stillingfleet’s *The Unreasonableness of Separation* (London: [n.pub.], 1681). Owen claimed agreement with the Church of England on “doctrine as declared at the first reformation and explained in the next age ensuing thereon...If there be a change made in or of these doctrines...by any in or of the Church of England, we profess our disagreement from them, and do declare that thereby the foundation of our communion with them is weakened, and the principal bond of it loosened.” ‘The Enquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches’, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. by William H. Goold, 24 vols (London and Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850-1855), XV, 345.

<sup>66</sup> Samuel Petto, *The Difference between the Old and New Covenant*, (London: [n.pub.]1674). Other works to which Owen contributed prefaces that reaffirmed Calvinism in the face of Arminianism included Bartholomew Ashwood’s *The Best Treasure* (London: William Marshal, 1681) and William Bridge’s, *The Freeness of the Grace and Love of God to Believers* (London: Nat. Crouch, 1671). There were other defences of strict Calvinism less connected to Owen. For example, the Cromwellian Independent Thomas Brooks’ *A Golden Key to Open Hidden Treasures* (London: Dorman Newman, 1675), pp.203-8, 370-72; the Presbyterian Thomas Danson’s *A friendly Conference; Vindiciae Veritatis* (London: [n.pub.], 1672) which argued the immutability of the elect, and *The Saint’s Perserverance asserted and vindicated* (London: Tho. Parkhurst, 1672).



with binary subdivisions to set out his argument, and significantly dwelt at length on the “*evidences of interest in the New Covenant*”(my italics). He acknowledged but passed over the “testimony of the Divine Spirit” and Sanctification which he considered “but a secondary or after Evidence” in order to concentrate on Faith. He argued that only through “the operations and actings of a precious faith” may a soul “have a clear knowledge of its actual interest in the New and better Covenant.”<sup>67</sup> His insistence on the paramount importance of faith as “an Evidence of things not seen” recaptured the concerns of Calvin over a century earlier, and suggests that the interpretation and demonstration of faith still preoccupied those who had inherited his legacy.

The defence of double predestination was also the occasion of more extreme articulations of the decree of reprobation. This was most notably the case in *Reprobation Asserted: or, Of Eternal Election and Reprobation*,<sup>68</sup> in which a verse from Romans 11 - “*The Election have obtained it, and the REST were blinded*” - was expounded in stark and uncompromising terms:

These words are shedding words, they sever between men and men; the Election, the Rest; the Chosen, the Left; the Embraced, the Refused...Are not some (yea the most) the Children of the Flesh, the Rest, the Lost, the Vessels of Wrath, of Dishonour, and the Children of Perdition?<sup>69</sup>

For a writer concerned to refute those opposed to the decree of reprobation, spiritual doubt was clearly less of an issue than spiritual defection. However, it is all too easy to follow suit, and allow the prominent battles over the validity of Calvinism in this period to obscure the anxiety of those who were still very much in its grip. Works such as *Reprobation Asserted* were as likely to have been read by sympathisers as by adversaries (whatever the author’s intentions), and such a passage would have exacerbated anxiety amongst the insecure.

Continuing Arminian objections elicited renewed assertions of grace over works, but there were also disputes between Calvinists themselves. In his ardent defence of grace, the Presbyterian John Howe jettisoned double predestination, arguing that God “doth so far *really will* the salvation of all, as not to omit the doing that which may effect it, if they be not neglectful of themselves”.<sup>70</sup> He was answered by firm statements of double predestination from another ejected Minister, Thomas

<sup>67</sup> Petto, *Old and New Covenant*, pp. 6,7, 288-299, 288, 295, 289.

<sup>68</sup> *Reprobation Asserted: or, The Doctrine of Eternal Election and Reprobation Promiscuously handled, In Eleven Chapters, wherein The most material Objections made by the Opposers of this Doctrine, are fully Answered; several Doubts Removed, and sundry Cases of Conscience Resolved* (London: G.L., [1674?]).

<sup>69</sup> *Reprobation Asserted*, pp. 2-3. Richard Greaves writes that “it is possible to argue plausibly either for or against Bunyan’s authorship of ‘Reprobation Asserted’” but suggests that the “likelihood” is that it was written by someone else who was “an open-membership, open-communion Particular Baptist”. Richard Greaves, *John Bunyan and English Nonconformity*, (London and Rio Grande: The Hambledon Press, 1992), p. 185-191.



Danson, in *De Causa Dei* (1678).<sup>71</sup> Richard Baxter's unpredictable opinions frequently upset people of all persuasions, two notable occasions being his defence of Fowler against Bunyan in *How Far Holiness is the Design of Christianity* (1671), and the lectures he subsequently gave on Justification at Pinner Hall – a joint endeavour between Congregationalists and Presbyterians that was not without friction. His *Catholick Theologie: Plain, Pure, Peacable: for the Pacification of the Dogmatical Word Warriours*, far from pouring oil on troubled waters, only made things worse.<sup>72</sup> Antinomian controversies rumbled on until after the Toleration Act, and were increasingly to divide moderate Presbyterian and strict separatist Calvinists, hardening the theology of the latter.<sup>73</sup>

Theological squabbles over double predestination occasioned some severe articulations of the decree of Reprobation as part of the endeavour to preserve the absolute power of God's grace, but one may question to what extent ordinary experimental Calvinists would have been exposed to that shift in tone. N.H. Keeble discusses at length nonconformist levels of literacy, the affordability of their texts, and the implied reader at which different types of works were aimed. He concludes that "a higher proportion of the nonconformist body than of the population generally was literate", estimating that a third of the 330,000 nonconformists (out of an overall population in England of 3.5 million adults) could read, representing 13-15 per cent of the literate population as a whole.<sup>74</sup> Keeble also argues that these figures (which he acknowledges can only be estimates) are

for all their shortcomings, a measure of positive commitment, a significant part of which consisted, especially when persecution prevented meetings or removed the minister, in literary study. Nonconformists were not only able but diligent readers...No other body of seventeenth-century literature could address itself to so readily definable and so large a readership.<sup>75</sup>

Writers of diaries and spiritual autobiography were clearly literate, and the textual sources for their theology are best considered in terms of individual cases against this more general background. It is

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<sup>70</sup> John Howe, *The Reconcilableness of Gods Prescience of the Sins of Men, with the Wisdom and Sincerity of His Counsels* (London: Brabaxon Aylmer, 1677), p. 105.

<sup>71</sup> Thomas Danson, *De Causa Dei, or, a Vindication of the Common Doctrine of Protestant Divines, concerning Predestination*, (London: Tho. Cockerill, 1678), sigs A2<sup>r</sup>, A4<sup>r</sup>, A3<sup>v</sup>, pp. 44, 104-5, 110, 121-122.

<sup>72</sup> Wallace, pp. 180-181.

<sup>73</sup> For a study of Calvinism after 1689, see Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity, 1689-1765* (London: The Olive Tree, 1967).

<sup>74</sup> Keeble, *Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, pp. 132-43, 138. Richard Greaves, in *John Bunyan and English Nonconformity* (London: Hambledon Press, 1992), p. 2, is at variance with Keeble, suggesting that "perhaps a figure of roughly 180,000 would approximate the strength of Dissent in 1669, thereby indicating that they amounted to perhaps four per cent of the population." He argues that the Presbyterian population was approximately three times that of the Congregationalists, and four times that of the Baptists. Keeble's interpretation is based on Michael R. Watt's figures for the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, which might account for the disparity, but nonetheless it is a reminder that statistical estimates must be used with caution. Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978). This does not, however, invalidate Keeble's argument that nonconformist literacy was an indication of commitment in the face of persecution.

<sup>75</sup> Keeble, *Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, pp. 138-9.



harder to assess the literacy of those who allowed their conversion narratives to be edited and published. In any case, however, experimental Calvinists who were not ministers or theologians were more likely to absorb scholastic anxieties over predestinarian issues indirectly through sermons or works of practical piety (indeed they were often delivered or written by the same individuals responsible for the denser scholastic works).<sup>76</sup>

### Experimental Calvinist Sermons

Experimental Calvinist sermons frequently tackled the problem of despair over salvation. Samuel Annesley (a strict Calvinist Presbyterian) edited two collections of Nonconformist sermons. In the second there is a sermon by a 'Mr Cole'.<sup>77</sup> Cole acknowledged the familiar difficulty of finding a balance between doubt and complacency in his sermon on "How we may steer an even course between Presumption and Despair".<sup>78</sup> The sermon was structured around a binary Ramist approach; Cole identified a "double presumption" (of self and of God) and a "double despair" (again of self and of God) and used a traditional bifurcating table to illustrate his argument.<sup>79</sup> He offered a middle ground between the two in his reminder that all in this world is inevitably imperfect and mixed – that all hope is shot through with despair, and vice versa. The sermons of other preachers, however, tended to fall into one of two camps – those that stressed the generosity of God's grace, and those that concentrated on His wrath. William Bridge suggested means whereby to serve and work "in conduct of free grace and love", and, unlike others who had emphasised the arbitrariness of God's judgement, he stressed that "God's Rod is a teaching Rod, and it brings many lessons with it".<sup>80</sup> By contrast, John Walwood's sermon on "the Difficulty of Conversion" intimidated his audience with his assertion of the small number of the elect. He argued that "there will be few saved in this Generation, when the Lord comes to judge and reckon with it", and went on:

I confess, it is a hard Matter for a man to be saved, even when he is most circumspect and watchful...even his own People...God will overthrow, and he will send them in his Anger through Death; and he will spare few Ministers, yea few Nonconformist Ministers; he'll have them die in the Wilderness; so there shall be but a few shall come through, and see the glory of the Lord.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Notable examples include John Owen and Samuel Petto; there were many others.

<sup>77</sup> This was probably the Independent Minister Thomas Cole, who in 1674 succeeded Philip Nye as Minister of the Silver Street congregation in London; he also preached at Pinnars Hall. *D.N.B.* IV, 729-730.

<sup>78</sup> *A Supplement to the Morning Exercise at Cripplegate or, Several more Cases of Conscience Practically Resolved by Sundry Ministers* ed. by Samuel Annesley (London: Thomas Cockerill, 1674), p. 593. [Hereafter referred to as *Cripplegate*.]

<sup>79</sup> *Cripplegate*, p. 600.

<sup>80</sup> William Bridge, *The Freeness of Grace* (London: Nath. Crouch, 1671), pp. 23, 153. Before the Restoration, William Bridge had preached in Great Yarmouth and for the Long Parliament; after it he preached to an Independent congregation in Clapham. *DNB*, II, 1223-1224.

<sup>81</sup> John Walwood, 'A Sermon upon the Difficulty of Conversion', bound with Patrick Gillespie, *Ruler's Sins the Causes of National Judgements* (Edinburgh: [n. pub.], 1650), pp. 21, 24.



Walwood conceded that “a Remnant shall be saved” but followed with the observation that “They’ll not be so many as Folk trows.”<sup>82</sup> The struggle to resolve the relationship between doubt and complacency fell apart into polarised representations that addressed one or the other but could not negotiate the two. That extremism was a response to continued Calvinist despair in a new context of persecution; some preachers, threatened by the national defection from double predestination, sought to frighten their listeners into allegiance; others struggled to console the distressed souls in their care. Of course different congregations may have invited different approaches, but more fundamentally the extreme differences between preachers such as Bridge and Walwood are revealing of the continuing experimental Calvinist ambivalence over the utility and sinfulness of despair. The Congregationalist minister Jeremiah Burroughes addressed the problem of how to know whether one had the right kind of fear in a sermon in the published collection *Gospel-Fear: or The Heart Trembling at the Word of God, evidenceth a Blessed Frame of Spirit*, published posthumously in 1674.<sup>83</sup> He argued that a “true sanctified trembling” could be discerned by the following signs:

That thy Fear is the greatest Fear, that swallows up all other Fears. That thou dost justifie God in this thy Fear. That thou dost fear the departure from God as well as the wrath of God. That nothing can quiet thee but Reconciliation. That this do not drive thee from God, but drives thee to God.<sup>84</sup>

There was always the danger that one’s trembling might only be the “Fear that some Reprobates have, and may have”; if it resulted in a compulsion to seek God, it was “a good sign that this Fear and trembling is right.”<sup>85</sup> The argument made preparation imperative. The experimental Calvinist accent on signification and discernment was most explicit in a sermon by Mr Veal on Isaiah 27.11: “For it is a People of no understanding, therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will shew them no favour”. Veal considered the different kinds of knowledge necessary to salvation, and argued that there was no excuse for not acquiring them:

They will at last find themselves greatly deceived, that think they shall be saved because they are poor ignorant creatures, and know no better: that is, that they shall be saved because they know not what will cure them...they may read their doom in the text, which will one day be made good upon them.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Walwood, p. 25.

<sup>83</sup> Jeremiah Burroughes, *Gospel-Fear: or, The Heart Trembling at the Word of God, evidenceth a Blessed Frame of Spirit* (London: B. Aylmer, 1674). The publication was posthumous; Burroughes died in 1646.

<sup>84</sup> Burroughes, *Gospel-Fear*, pp. 32, 35.

<sup>85</sup> Burroughes, *Gospel-Fear*, p. 35.

<sup>86</sup> *Cripplegate*, p. 131.



The ambivalence over the useful sinfulness of despair, along with the emphasis on signification and discernment, and the need for preparation, were central to the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading and writing salvation.

### Experimental Calvinist Works of Practical Piety

More than either the scholastic arguments in defense of double predestination or the sermons with their mixed messages of grace and gloom, works of practical piety acknowledged and sought to redress Calvinist anxieties over election.<sup>87</sup> They tended to be more widely available than the scholastic works, being both cheaper and often running to many editions.<sup>88</sup> Differences between Congregationalists, Particular Baptists and Presbyterians were even less clear-cut in these texts than in the doctrinal or ecclesiastical debates. All shared a common preoccupation with conversion within the context of the doctrine of preparation, but, as with the sermons, the tone of such books varied as much according to whether they sought to address the complacent unconverted or the despairing weak believer, as according to their sectarian background. A handful of such works evidence the ongoing concern with anxiety over election, and subtle shifts in emphasis within an overall similarity of purpose: the Independent Theophilus Gale's *The Anatomie of Infidelitie* (1672); Richard Baxter's prolific output including *The Saint's Everlasting Rest* (1649), *A Call to the Unconverted* (1658), *Directions and Persuasions to a Sound Conversion* (1658), and *Directions for Weak Distempered Christians* (1669); and the Presbyterian Joseph Alleine's *An Alarme to Unconverted Sinners* (posthumously published in 1671).

Theophilus Gale had been an assistant to John Rowe, Minister of an Independent Congregation that met (in defiance of the First Conventicle Act) in St Andrew's Parish, Holborn, since 1666; in 1677 he succeeded Rowe as Pastor, but died a year later.<sup>89</sup> His *Anatomie of Infidelitie* was designed to "awaken and provoke *secure unbelievers*"<sup>90</sup> and the advice of the preface that "if thou meet with any word beyond thy capacitie to apprehend, remember that the following word usually explains the

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<sup>87</sup> There was a tradition of such works, among the most widely circulated of which were written by Richard Sibbes. Richard Sibbes, *The Saint's Cordials* (London: Robert Dawlman, 1629); *The Bruised Reede and Smoaking Flax*, (London: Robert Dawlman, 1630); *The Soule's Conflict*, (London: Robert Dawlman, 1635) *The Soule's Conflict* was re-issued in 1651, and *The Saint's Cordials* (with additional sermons) in 1658, demonstrating a continuing interest in Sibbes among experimental Calvinists.

<sup>88</sup> Keeble, *Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, pp. 132-135. Keeble argues that at the cheaper end of the market, nonconformist texts, or versions of them, formed over thirty per cent of the chapbook market, and that at the lower end of the next price range, for 1s. or 1s.6d readers might select from works such as Baxter's *Call to the Unconverted* (1658) and the Particular Baptist Benjamin Keach's *Travels of True Godliness* (1683); for 2s. Oliver Heywood's *Heart Treasure*, and for 2s.6d Joseph Alleine's *Alarme to Unconverted Sinners* (1671). These prices placed such works within reach of yeomen or freeholders, shopkeepers, tradesmen, small merchants and professional people. Furthermore, works of a pastoral nature were sometimes distributed gratis by their authors, as in the case of Oliver Heywood's *Heart Treasure*, or Richard Baxter's *A Call to the Unconverted* and *Poor Man's Family Book*.

<sup>89</sup> *D.N.B.* VII, 817-8.

same", suggests that it's author had in mind a less educated readership. Gale concealed neither the "plagues and curses of Hel wrapt up in Divine Wrath" nor the "sin-revenging, jelous [sic]" nature of the Calvinist God, but also placed great stress on the "efficacies" of Christ's tears. He wrote of unbelief as a "privation" of faith, and his representation of its "black and prodigious Nature" was similar to Owen's in its recognition of the paralysis occasioned by an inability to trust in one of the double possibilities of one's predestination:

This is the condition of many awakened sinners, they arrive at some anxious suspense or doutfulness of mind, and that is al: They hang in the air of commun [sic] conviction, between Heaven and Hel...They dare not, they cannot yield a ful, and prevalent assent to the Gospel of Christ: al that they attain unto, is a mere opinion, a suspensive faint Assent. Thus every unbeliever hangs, as a Meteor in the Air, under prevalent suspense, and hesitation...<sup>91</sup>

Gale was emphatic that such "suspensive faith" was no true faith, but at the same time he needed to embrace the notion that true believers were not entirely free of doubt either. Like Calvin before him, Gale worried away at the 'certainty' of faith:

I shal not dispute, what mesure or degree of *certainitie* is *essential* to true saving Faith; but that it cannot consist in a mere *opinion*, or probable conjecture, without some degree of *certitude*, I think, is most certain...<sup>92</sup>

Gale was writing in different epistemological era, but still he wrestled with the problem of absolutes.<sup>93</sup> On the one hand he acknowledged that "Believers themselves, have many Reliques and remains of Unbelief in them", but on the other he asserted that "there is no medium, or middle, between true Faith and Infidelitie". In the midst of apparent contradiction, Gale clung to the issue of focus as raised by Perkins; the idea that the elect might doubt their own status, but never the "Truth of the Promise" to which they must always give "a *plenitude*, or fulnesse of Assent".<sup>94</sup> Gale adhered to the doctrine of temporary faith, observing that "The Unbeliever may yield some feeble, staggering, instable Assent", and used it as an incentive to self-examination:

Doth not the great Ressemblance that there is between Saving Faith and commun, oblige al to trie of what *stampe*, and *make* their faith is?...How dreadfully do *millions* of Unbelievers delude themselves with a sick dream, and shadow of commun faith?<sup>95</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Gale, sig. 3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>91</sup> Gale, pp. 4, 41, 40, 47-58, sig. 3<sup>v</sup>, p. 133.

<sup>92</sup> Gale, p. 130.

<sup>93</sup> On shifts in notions of certainty in the seventeenth century, see Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationship between Science, Religion, Law and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

<sup>94</sup> Gale, pp. 215, 209, 131. Perkins, *Golden Chaine*, sig. R2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>95</sup> Gale, p. 233.



The metaphor of faith as a “stampe” or imprint implied notions of the soul as a page or text demanding scrutiny; the relationship between inscription and perseverance was to reverberate throughout endeavours to ascertain and fix one’s spiritual status through acts of autobiography. Gale also tried to negotiate the latent contradiction in Calvinism between preparation and predestination. The fundamental paradox that man had no free will yet he was responsible resulted in an equivocation over will and impotence in the following passage:

Man’s ruine is from himself...it is wilful blindness and impotence... Surely this wilful Impotence, or rather impotent wilfulness evidently demonstrates, that impenitent sinners frame their own Hel [sic].<sup>96</sup>

Gale made it clear that “a secret, dilatorie, procrastinating delaying” of the work of preparation was itself a form of Unbelief, and had no patience with those who may have felt they had good reason to defer discovery of their destination.<sup>97</sup> The doctrine of preparation ‘converted’ passivity into activity, insisting on an approach towards self-knowledge even as it made room for the deferral of assurance.

Gale’s ‘awakening’ *Anatomy* was typical of the many works of practical piety that were available to the experimental Calvinist. However, the most prolific author of such works, Richard Baxter, was exceptionally moderate and rationalist in his Calvinism, which partook of unusual heterodoxy even for an age of shifting allegiances.<sup>98</sup> His prolific output included *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest* (1650), “written by the Author in the time of his own languishing”; *Right Method for a Settled Peace of*

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<sup>96</sup> Gale, p. 68.

<sup>97</sup> Richard Sibbes had also chastised those who deferred the work of preparation because of a sense of “their unworthinesse and inability”. Richard Sibbes, *Soules Conflict*, p. 622.

<sup>98</sup> It is impossible to do justice to Baxter’s shifting, and often seemingly contradictory, views, without an extensive analysis of his enormously prolific output – a task that is beyond the scope of a study that focuses more specifically on experimental Calvinism. In *A Third Defence of the Cause of Peace* (1681) Baxter himself commented that “You could not (except a Catholick Christian) have truelier called me than an Episcopal-Presbyterian-Independent” indicating his unwillingness to be aligned with any single group. His most consistent stance is a favouring of unity and a horror of sectarian division: in *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest* (London: Thomas Underhil and Francis Tyton, 1650) he argued that “Many doctrinal differences must be tolerated in a church... Disunion and separation is intolerable”, and it was a theme that recurred throughout his career. It underlay his objections to the separatism of the gathered churches, coupled with his pastoral concern that only those confident of their conversion could be admitted to them. He wondered “how any Christian can make himself believe that the love and grace of Christ is confined to so narrow a room” and asserted that “all men are imperfect and faulty, and so is all men’s worship of God; and he that will not communicate with faulty worship, must renounce communion with the world.” Baxter’s theological position is harder to pin down. He could write “I know no man since the Apostle days whom I value and honour more than Calvin” and he also defended the Synod of Dort for what he considered its ‘temperate’ Calvinism; he noted that it did not inscribe Supralapsarianism, declined to say that only a small number were elected, had argued that God reprobated on the grounds of the sin of the reprobate, and had avoided any avenues that might lead to Antinomian lack of discipline. ‘Preface’, *The Grotian Religion*, (Kidderminster: N. Simmons, 1658), n. sig. – sig. C7<sup>r</sup>. [The preface begins three pages before the commencement of sig. A.] Baxter’s heterodoxy can be seen as a response to the conflictual nature of ‘Calvinism’ combined with a new and fraught political and ecclesiastical context. His unusual position – or rather, positions – disqualify the *Reliquarie Baxterianae* from consideration as an example of experimental Calvinist autobiography. Published posthumously, it cannot even be considered in terms of its possible influence. However, his pastoral works would have been read across the Nonconformist community and, in their



*Conscience, and Spiritual Comfort* (1653); *A Call to the Unconverted* (1658); *Directions and Persuasions to a Sound Conversion* (1658); *Directions for Weak Distempered Christians* (1669) and *The Christian Directory* (1673). They ran to many editions: Baxter wrote that 20,000 copies of *A Call to the Unconverted* were printed in the year of its publication, 1658, and he had no need to advertise his popularity; by 1685 it had reached a twenty-third edition, another 25,000 or so copies. *The Saint's Everlasting Rest* had reached a thirteenth edition by 1688.<sup>99</sup> Baxter often distributed his own works gratis; encouraged his readers to give books as acts of charity, especially to the poor; and arranged with his publishers Thomas Underhill and Francis Tyton, and later Nevil Simmons, that they should be sold as cheaply as possible. Furthermore, extracts and selections from his works were piratically published in cheap format.<sup>100</sup> There remains the question of whether his works would have been read by stricter Calvinists. One should not defer to denominational labels that give an inaccurate picture of the fluidity of opinion that in fact existed across Congregationalist, Particular Baptist and Presbyterian divisions. The widespread availability of his works makes it extremely likely that they would have been familiar to many such Calvinists, with whom indeed Baxter had much in common. Like the Congregationalist Samuel Petto, Baxter primarily sought to enable and console, but he was also quite capable of reminding his readers of the wrathful nature of their God, as in the following passage from *The Saint's Everlasting Rest*:

The torments of the damned must needs be extream, because they are the effects of Divine reveng [sic]...this Justice and Revenge will be the delight of the Almighty...he will take pleasure in their execution.<sup>101</sup>

However, in general Baxter was concerned by the anxiety caused by the decree of Reprobation, even if he did not disown it. He provides a valuable insight into the nature of Calvinist uncertainty and despair, for his general willingness to disrupt orthodox party lines when they could not accommodate his beliefs meant that his engagement with Calvinist anxiety was less constrained than for those who wrote with the interests of strict Calvinism at stake. His pastoral experience as a minister in Kidderminster, together with his own personal "languishings", and the great demand for his books, indicate that doubt over election remained a real problem and was not simply a rhetorical by-product of Arminian polemic. In the *Christian Directory* Baxter observes that

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preoccupation with conversion and the experience of doubt over salvation, form an important commentary upon the pressures to which the experimental Calvinist autobiographers were responding.

<sup>99</sup> Keeble, *Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, p. 128.

<sup>100</sup> Keeble, *Literary Culture of Nonconformity*, pp. 132, 133, 134. As late as 1716, Samuel Clifford was to edit passages from *The Christian Directory* into a work directed at those "who are wounded in spirit": *The Signs and Causes of Melancholy, with directions suited to the case of those who are afflicted with it* (London: S. Cruttenden and T. Cox, 1716), title page. [Hereafter referred to as *Signs and Causes of Melancholy*.]

<sup>101</sup> Baxter, *Saint's Everlasting Rest*, p. 321.



They are oft tempted to gather despairing Thoughts from the Doctrine of predestination, and to think that if God hath reprobated, or hath not elected them, all that they can do, or that all the World can do, cannot save them.<sup>102</sup>

As with earlier Calvinists, anxiety focused on the nature of true saving faith. Like Gale, Baxter pointed out a confusion between faith in one's salvation and faith in the saving power of Christ:

They always say that they cannot believe, and therefore think they cannot be saved: Because that commonly they mistake the Nature of Faith, and take it to be a Believing that they themselves are forgiven, and in Favour with God and shall be Saved: And because they cannot believe this, (which their Disease will not suffer them to believe) therefore they think that they are no Believers: Whereas saving Faith is nothing but such a Belief that the Gospel is true, and Christ the Saviour of the World.<sup>103</sup>

The opening "They always say" suggests that Baxter had in mind real voices, real people, who had approached him for pastoral guidance in the past. That Baxter needed to tease apart assurance and faith in order to offer comfort is a response revealing of the continuing Calvinist dynamic whereby an insistence on assurance served only to undermine it.<sup>104</sup>

Baxter picked up on two important features of such anxiety that find expression in experimental Calvinist Autobiography. The first is the sense of isolation suffered by those who believe themselves reprobate:

And yet they think that *never any one was as they are*: I have had Abundance in a few Weeks with me, almost just in the same case; and yet everyone saith, *never anyone was as they*.<sup>105</sup>

That sense of isolation was to be a major imperative behind the urge to communicate one's spiritual journey, and align it with those of others through autobiographies that frequently adhered to formulaic structures.<sup>106</sup> The second feature of Calvinist anxiety noted by Baxter was what might now be termed 'obsessional neuroses'; the self-recoiling habit of mind fostered by doubt of one's election:

<sup>102</sup> *Signs and Causes of Melancholy*, pp. 7, 8.

<sup>103</sup> *Signs and Causes of Melancholy*, p. 10.

<sup>104</sup> The interplay between medical concepts of melancholia and Calvinism is discussed by John Stachniewski in relation to Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Stachniewski, *Persecutory Imagination*, pp. 219-253.

<sup>105</sup> *Signs and Causes of Melancholy*, p. 9.

<sup>106</sup> For example, in her autobiography Hannah Allen records that in the past, fearful she had committed the unpardonable sin, she "privately conflicted for some months, not revealing it...to anyone, thinking with myself that never any was like me, and therefore was loath to make my condition known". Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings with that Choice Christian Mrs Hannah Allen* (London: John Wallis, 1683), p. 4.

Their Thoughts are most upon themselves, like the Millstones that grind on themselves when they have no Grist; so one Thought begets another. Their Thoughts are taken up about their thoughts; when they have thought irregularly, they think again what they have been thinking on... Self-troubling is the sum of their Thoughts and Lives.<sup>107</sup>

That obsessive mental revisiting can be discerned in many of the autobiographical narratives, and found its most sophisticated expression in the textual density of Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*. It was also to be associated with hermeneutic re-reading of an affective experience of the Word.

While experimental Calvinists repeatedly enjoined their readers to prepare for grace by reading the Word, Baxter observed that it was frequently a source of further disquiet:

They never read or hear of any miserable Instance, but they are thinking that this is their case. If they hear of Cain, or Pharaoh given up to Hardness of Heart; or do but read that some are Vessels of Wrath fitted to Destruction, or that they have Eyes and see not, Ears and hear not, Hearts and understand not, they think, this is all spoken of me, or this is just my case... They read all the threatenings of the Word with quick sense and Application; but the Promises they read over and over without taking Notice of them.<sup>108</sup>

Baxter discusses with a reasoned detachment some of the afflictions that surface repeatedly in experimental Calvinist autobiography: possession by voices and the impulse to blaspheme. He notes that those doubting of their election

are usually so taken up with basic and earnest thoughts (which being perplexed do but strive with themselves, and contradict one another,) that they feel it just as if something were speaking with them<sup>109</sup>

and that "they are almost always troubled with hideous Blasphemous Temptations... The very pain of their fears, doth draw their thoughts to what they fear."<sup>110</sup> His comment that "they have lost the power of governing their thought by Reason"<sup>111</sup> suggests an overt distrust of the experiential hearing of the Word so prominent, for example, in *Grace Abounding*, and which sets Baxter apart from the experimental Calvinist community of readers.

Like Petto and Gale, Baxter stressed the importance of preparation, arguing in *Directions for Weak Distempered Christians* the "necessity of weak Christians seeking stability, confirmation and

<sup>107</sup> *Signs and Causes of Melancholy*, p. 12.

<sup>108</sup> *Signs and Causes of Melancholy*, p. 8, 9.

<sup>109</sup> *Signs and Causes of Melancholy*, p. 18.

<sup>110</sup> *Signs and Causes of Melancholy*, p. 19.

<sup>111</sup> *Signs and Causes of Melancholy*, p. 15.



increase of Grace”,<sup>112</sup> and discussing degrees of assurance in Section Four of *The Saint’s Everlasting Rest*, which addressed itself to the following:

The Nature of Assurance, or certainty of Salvation opened; How much, and what the Spirit doth to the producing it: And what Scripture, what knowledg [sic], what Faith, what Holiness and Evidences, what conscience or internall sense, and what Reason or discourse do in this work.<sup>113</sup>

Again, like Petto and Gale, he encouraged his readers to engage in self-examination,<sup>114</sup> advising them that “If you will be convetted [sic] and saved, be much in secret serious consideration...Withdraw yourselves oft into retired secrecy”.<sup>115</sup> Secret self-examination was a founding principle of experimental Calvinist diary-writing.

Baxter’s practical pastoral works show a keen awareness of the nature and intensity of experimental Calvinist anxiety over election, and suggest that comfort must be sought through the work of preparation; echoing Gale, he admonished his readers to “do what you are able first, and then complain of God for denying you grace if you have cause.” Whereas Gale tried to suppress the essential conflict between preparation and predestination, Baxter could not conceal it and acknowledged that some of his readers might harbour reservations on those grounds, but refused to be drawn into confrontation. Citing the possible objection that “you seem to intimate all this while that man hath free will” he replied only that “the dispute about freewill is beyond your capacity”.<sup>116</sup> As with earlier Calvinism, the ‘utility of obscurity’ was ultimately the only way to resolve the paradox of preparation within a schema of predestination. That paradox was to destabilise experimental Calvinist endeavors to read and write themselves into salvation.

Petto, Gale, and the more moderate Baxter all addressed themselves to the problem of Calvinist doubt over election, and advised their readers that resolution lay in preparation and self-examination. Baxter also wrote a prefatory epistle to a work of practical piety by the Presbyterian Joseph Alleine, entitled *An Alarme to Unconverted Sinners*, first published in 1672 and running to many editions.<sup>117</sup> Like many experimental Calvinists before him, Alleine was fascinated by the moment and the means of conversion, and in his treatise he set out to show “What Conversion is not, and correcting some mistakes about it”; “What Conversion is, and wherein it consisteth”; “The Necessity of Conversion”;

<sup>112</sup> Baxter, *Directions for Weak Distempered Christians*, sig. B3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>113</sup> Baxter, *Saint’s Everlasting Rest*, p. 388.

<sup>114</sup> Baxter, *Saint’s Everlasting Rest*, pp. 386, 428.

<sup>115</sup> Baxter, *Call to the Unconverted*, p. 274.

<sup>116</sup> Baxter, *Call to the Unconverted*, pp. 231, 131.

<sup>117</sup> After 1672 and 1673, there were subsequent editions in 1678, 1688, 1689, 1691, 1695, 1700 and on into the eighteenth century.

“The Marks of the Unconverted”; “The Miserie of the Unconverted”; “Directions for Conversion”; and “Motives for Conversion.”<sup>118</sup> Although Alleine was a Presbyterian, his address to the ‘unconverted’ had more in common with Gale’s *Anatomy* than with Petto or Baxter’s more temperate works. Just as the sermons tended to polarise into promises of grace or hell-fire, so the works of practical piety tended to conceive of their reader as either nervous but well-intentioned, or lazy and complacent. The danger, of course, was that the weak believer might be unnecessarily damaged in an unforeseen encounter with a severity ill-suited to them. Alleine felt it more important to stir up terror in the “Ignorant, Carnal and Ungodly” before showing them a way forward. Carnal complacency was for Alleine the chief danger:

If thou wilt not understand thy misery and thy danger, there’s an end of all hopes concerning thee...Who will bear the labour and the pangs of the new birth that is confident he is already passed from death to life?<sup>119</sup>

He deliberately set about undermining such security:

But Friend, let me a little reason with thee; Thou art confident it is well with thee, yet why wilt Thou not yield to this much at least, to put it to the question, Am I not mistaken?<sup>120</sup>

Alleine wooed his “Dearly Beloved, and longed for” reader by reminding them of the deceptiveness of appearances and the ease with which one might mistake oneself for one of the elect. He remarked that

The Devil hath made many counterfeits of this conversion, and cheats one with this, and another with that; and such a craft and artifice he hath, in this mystery of deceits, that (if it were possible) he would deceive the very Elect.<sup>121</sup>

In line with Calvin, Perkins, and his contemporary, Gale, he reiterated the notion of temporary faith as a condition of mis-reading, of failing to discern a concealed, but ever-present truth. He observed that there were a

sort of unsanctified persons, that carry not their marks in their foreheads, but more secretly and covertly in their hands. These do frequently deceive themselves and others, and pass for good Christians, when they are all the while unsound at bottom... Multitudes miscarry by the hand of some secret sin, that is not only hidden from others, but (for want of observing their own hearts) even from themselves.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Alleine, title page.

<sup>119</sup> Alleine, sigs A2<sup>r</sup>, B7<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>120</sup> Alleine, sig. B7<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>121</sup> Alleine, sigs C<sup>r</sup>, C4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>122</sup> Alleine, p. 93. Richard Sibbes was another who argued that one could see salvation in the countenance. *Soule’s conflict*, p. 593.



The fear that one might have committed the ‘unpardonable sin’, and uncertainty as to what the nature of that sin was, was often expressed in autobiographical writing.<sup>123</sup> One might ask whether Alleine was ‘recycling’ anxieties he had encountered either in such works or while going about his pastoral work, seeking to transfer them to those who would benefit. For all the moderation and accommodation commonly associated with Presbyterianism, Alleine appears more concerned than many stricter Calvinists at the mass defection from the theology of double predestination. He terrorised his reader most in his depiction of a vengeful God intent on punishing the unconverted:

Know therefore that while thou art unconverted the infinite God is engaged against thee... thou art not only without God, but God is against thee... so much more horrible is it to fall into the hands of the living God, than into the paws of bears, or lions, yea furies, or devils. God himself will be thy tormentor; thy destruction shall come from the presence of the Lord.<sup>124</sup>

Alleine made no attempt to soften the decree of reprobation as a simple negation or absence of election – here God’s vengeance was proactive and violent. Alleine was, of course, adjusting his tone for the benefit of the hardened unregenerate, and one may again ask whether someone that hardened would have opened his book in the first place. Alleine is not unaware of the problem, but with a deft equivocation turns it to his advantage when he notes: “Unconverted persons how many are there, but how few unconverted Readers?”<sup>125</sup> On first glance, he might seem to be lamenting his inability to reach those most in need. It soon becomes apparent that he is actually exposing, and undermining, the complacency of the reader who might believe themselves to be engaging in a sincere attempt at preparation. By reminding the reader of the statistical unlikelihood of their salvation, Alleine disowned both the power of reading, and the power of his text, to effect conversion. At the same time, he was ‘unconverting’ his readers – stripping them of whatever assurance they might possess – in order to re-convert them. That process can almost be glimpsed at work in the British Library’s 1673 edition, in which the following passage is highlighted by a reader’s marginal note in faded ink:

Remember when thou liest down, that for ought thou knowest, thou maist awake in flames, and when thou risest up, that by the next night thou maist make thy bed in hell.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>123</sup> See, for example, Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 40 and Hannah Allen, p. 4.

<sup>124</sup> Alleine, pp. 109-110, 111.

<sup>125</sup> Alleine, sig. B6<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>126</sup> Alleine, p. 145. British Library shelfmark 4401.1.44. The marginal note takes the form of a double row of four short vertical lines; it is the only marginal notation in the book.

Of course one cannot know whether the annotation was added near the time of publication or at a later date, but it does suggest that at least one reader took Alleine's words to heart and retired to bed for a sleepless night.

Like Petto, Gale and Baxter, Alleine's writing had an evangelical purpose, but he was the most explicit in his engagement with the idea of reading as an act of preparation. *The Alarme to Unconverted Sinners* did not claim the transforming power of God's Word, but it could offer the reader a reflection of themselves:

Thou mayst read, but what hope is there in thy reading. Yet read on, This little hope there is; In this Book there is a Glass that will shew thee thy face. Dost thou know thine own face when thou seest it? Behold thy very Image in those Marks that are given of an unconverted person; Read and consider them, and then say, if thou be not the Man... And if upon trial by the marks that are before thee, thou come to be undeceived...the next news I expect to hear from thee is, What must I do to be Saved?<sup>127</sup>

Double predestination made fraught issues of interpretation; its apologists responded with a defensive emphasis on the power of the 'mark', a sign that was as much a spiritual 'imprint'. The self was to be read as one might read a book; mark and meaning had an intimate correspondence, but, as Gale argued in *The Anatomie of Infidelitie*, could only be read aright through the eyes of faith:

Divine Faith carries with it not only certaintie, but also Evidence: Thus Hebr. 11.1 *Faith is the evidence of things not seen*. Evidence implies a full, clear, manifest apprehension of things present: among which such are most evident, as are most visible...Its true, the objects of Faith are altogether absent, inevident, and *invisible*, as to sense or Reason; whence they are stiled, Things not seen. *Ay*, but yet they are *present, evident, and visible*, to an eye of faith...But the Unbeliever sees nothing evidently and clearly; he has only obscure, misty, dark notions of the things that belong unto his peace.<sup>128</sup>

Right reading was to become not only a means, but also a measure, of one's faith. The value and uses of inscription, the importance of 'marks' as 'evidences' and guarantees of presence, were to inform the literary strategies employed by experimental Calvinist autobiographers in the quest for assurance. The writers of works of practical piety encouraged and reflected that move: Gale and Alleine both recommended the use of spoken "soliloquies" as a mode of self-examination, and sometimes provided a possible form of words (Alleine sets the tone in his suggestion that the abject sinner say aloud "my own righteousness is but menstruous rags").<sup>129</sup> As already noted, Petto

<sup>127</sup> Alleine, sigs B7<sup>r</sup>, B6<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>128</sup> Gale, p. 133.

<sup>129</sup> Gale, p. 236; Alleine, pp. 178-184. Richard Sibbes had also recommended the use of soliloquies. Sibbes, *Soules Conflict*, p. 285.



encouraged the writing of experiences in *The Voice of the Spirit*, but again it was Alleine who most explicitly acknowledged the potency of inscription:

This covenant I advise you to make, not only in Heart, but in Word; not only in Word, but in Writing; and that you would with all possible reverence spread the Writing before the Lord, as if you would present it to him as your Act and Deed. And when you have done this, set your hand to it. Keep it as a Memorial of the Solemn Transactions that have passed between God and you, that you may have recourse to it in Doubts and Temptations.<sup>130</sup>

Notions of inscription or the written mark as both contract and memorial were to play an important part in attempts to fix transitory states of assurance through life-writing.

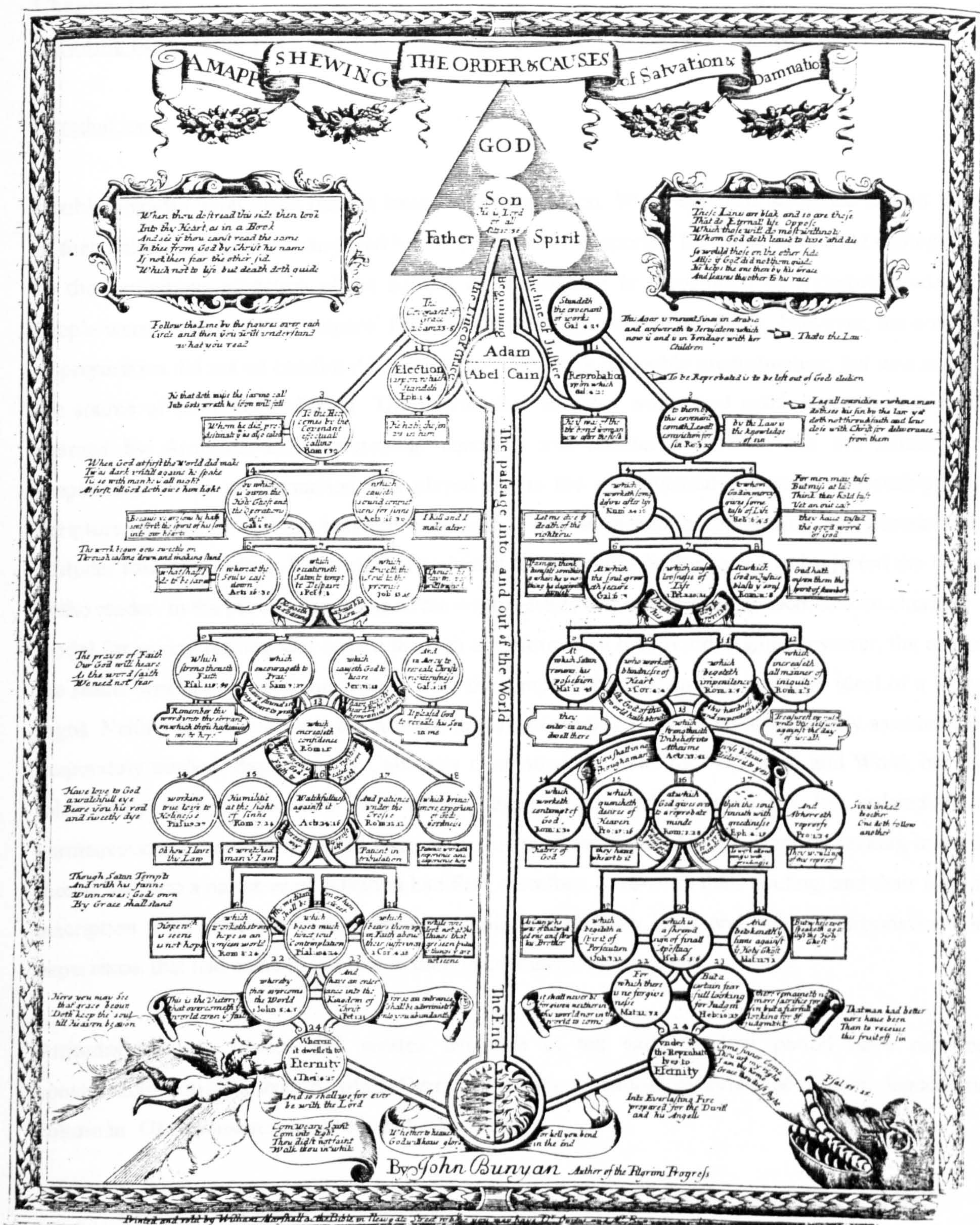
### Conclusion

Presbyterians and Independents were united in their objections to episcopacy but divided over the issue of separatist churches, and the differences in their ecclesiology were to have a formative impact upon the kinds of life-writing they adopted. The theology of double predestination persisted among both groups to varying degrees, and while Presbyterians have often been considered more moderate and rationalist in outlook, in fact punitive articulations of the decree of reprobation issued from members of both groups. In response to Arminianism and Antinomianism, the relationship between works and grace became increasingly charged, even as the need to discern one's salvation became more urgent. Weak believers were urged to prepare themselves for grace, but reminded at the same time of their own impotence. Those factors were to shape the troubled experimental Calvinist relationship with the Word as a source of assurance, and lead to tensions between experiential and hermeneutic models of reading. That anxiety of reading salvation is the subject of the following chapter.

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<sup>130</sup> Alleine, p. 70.





**Illustration 2: John Bunyan, 'A Mapp Shewing the Order & Causes of Salvation & Damnation',** from *The Works of that eminent Servant of Christ, Mr. John Bunyan*, ed. by Charles Doe (London: William Marshall, 1692), before p. 1. According to Doe's 'Catalogue-Table of Mr Bunyan's Books', Bunyan's *Mapp* was first published as a broadsheet in 1663 or 1664. (*Works*, sig. Tttt.1<sup>v</sup>) No copies of the broadsheet have survived. The original measures about 33.5 x 42.5 cms.



## Chapter Three

### 'Reading the Word': The Experimental Calvinist Anxiety of Reading Salvation

#### Introduction

Double predestination made fraught issues of interpretation. Weak believers struggled to find signs of their salvation, but were hampered by the doctrines of temporary faith and ineffectual calling, and by the vertiginous attraction of the horrors of reprobation. In recognition of widespread anxiety, people were encouraged to 'prepare' for assurance through reading the Bible. However, the concept of preparation did not sit comfortably within the framework of double predestination, but was instead the source of more contradiction. The relationship between works and grace became even more charged by Arminian and Antinomian concerns and counter-arguments, and the paradox of preparation within predestination was played out in the experimental Calvinist relationship with Scripture, leading to tension between experiential and hermeneutic approaches, and destabilising attitudes towards reading. Experimental Calvinist hermeneutics both courted and rejected the figure of the reader. In the process the status of the written letter was called into question, and an alternative model for saving reading was sought through a performative oral Word. Again, however, the role of the reader was undermined and worries over the temporality of assurance beset the ideal of a living logos. Neither hermeneutic nor experiential models of reading could provide the steady assurance so desperately needed. Experimental Calvinists recognised the need for both word and Word, but the relationship between the two was uneasy: experiential reading could not be isolated from hermeneutic re-reading that eroded fleeting moments of assurance. Autobiographers seeking to write themselves into a narrative of salvation had first, therefore, to re-write their reading, and their uses of inscription were informed by the tensions within and between letter and voice, interpretation and experience, that had come to the fore in their encounters with the Bible.

Attitudes towards spoken and written language in the early modern period have received considerable critical attention, while Derrida provides a seminal overview of western logocentric culture in *Of Grammatology*, in which he argues that

The history of metaphysics...has always assigned the origin of the truth in general to the logos: the history of truth, of the truth of truth, has always been...the debasement of writing, and its repression outside full speech...logocentrism ...is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Cakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 3, 11.



Some critics have felt constrained by postmodern notions of the ‘circularity’ of writing and speech. In *Authorizing Words: Speech, Writing and Print in the Renaissance*, Martin Elsky feels the need to refute what he considers as “the deconstructive certification... that speech is reducible to writing and writing to speech” on the grounds that it has obscured a proper examination of renaissance models of both spoken and written language. Murray Cohen’s *Linguistic Practice in England, 1640–1785* is less defensive, but also asserts that spoken *and* written models of language were available in the period. Experimental Calvinists were to be preoccupied with negotiating the relationship between the two in their attempts to arrive at saving reading. There are numerous other studies that deal more explicitly with Puritan linguistics, or which have bearing upon them, and there is not space to rehearse their arguments here.<sup>2</sup> Instead this chapter seeks to expose how the dynamics of double predestination contributed towards the particular linguistic concerns of experimental Calvinists: how anxieties over assurance were also anxieties of, and within, reading. Before looking to the strategies by which experimental Calvinists employed autobiographical writing to re-negotiate their encounters with the Word, it is first necessary to examine how the theology of double predestination created an anxiety of reading, and how that distress informed the relationship between inscription and saving faith.

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<sup>2</sup> On Puritan attitudes towards the Bible, see, for example, (in order of publication) : Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1972); John R. Knott, Jr, *The Sword of the Spirit: Puritan Responses to the Bible* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1980); Rivkah Zim, ‘The Reformation: The Trial of God’s Word’, in *Reading the Text*, ed. by Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 64–135; Isabel Rivers, *Reason Grace and Sentiment: A study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), I, pp. 1-163; *Calvin and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Richard C. Gamble (New York and London: Garland Pub. Inc., 1992); Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London and Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1993). Nigel Smith’s work on the language of radical religion provides a valuable account of the excesses that bound wary experimental Calvinists to the Letter: Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Important critiques of oral performative language include Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1967) and J.L. Austin’s *How to do things with Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). Critics concerned with the performative nature of language could also benefit from excursions into the discipline of performance studies; in particular, Peggy Phelan’s *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). The Reader-Response schools of criticism are also pertinent: see, in particular, Stanley E. Fish, ‘Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics’, and Wolfgang Iser, ‘The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach’, both in *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, ed. by Jane P. Tompkins (London and Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1980), pp. 70-100, 50-69. Works that deal more generally with Biblical hermeneutics within a postmodern context include: *Silence, the Word and the Sacred*, ed. by E.D. Blodgett and H.G. Coward (Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1989); *Reading the Text: Biblical Criticism and Literary Theory*, ed. by Stephen Prickett (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991); David Jasper, *Postmodernism, Literature, and the Future of Theology* (London: Macmillan, 1993). New Historicists continue to address hermeneutical tensions in the early modern period, with a focus on the materiality of cultural practices – see, for example, Stephen Greenblatt, ‘Remnants of the Sacred in Early Modern England’, in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. by Margreta De Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, Peter Stallybrass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). This study’s attempt to understand a particular ‘community of readers and their arts of reading’ (Chartier, p.vii) is, as discussed in the introduction, indebted to Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries In Europe Between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity Press, in association with Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994).



### The Experimental Calvinist Model of Hermeneutic Reading

Experimental Calvinist hermeneutics were founded upon Lutheran doctrine. Luther's insistence on the unity of faith and truth in turn informed his assertion that "the meaning of Scripture is...so certain, accessible, and clear that Scripture interprets itself"<sup>3</sup>. Calvin also articulated the doctrine of 'autopistos' or self-authentication, arguing that "the Scripture sheweth in it selfe no lesse apparaunte sense of her trueth, than white and blacke thynges do of their color, or swete and sower thinges of their tast."<sup>4</sup> William Whitaker had provided the most detailed exposition of the doctrine in English in *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, published in 1588.<sup>5</sup> Autopistos remained central to experimental Calvinist hermeneutics: John Owen, in *Of the Divine Originall, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Power of the Scriptures* (1659), reiterated the concept, arguing that the "Word is accompanied with its own Evidence, and gives Assurance unto us", and that it holds "a "self evidencing power".<sup>6</sup> As discussed in previous chapters, 'evidence', particularly of one's spiritual status, was an issue fraught with difficulty for both early and later Calvinists. Among the latter, for example, Samuel Petto remarked in *The Voice of the Spirit* that

I knew that faith, and other graces (when of the right stampe) were evidencing: but how to know true faith from false, and so for other graces, and that my heart did not deceive me in passing judgement on my condition... this hath put me to a stand

and admitted that he had suffered "many perplexities and feares... least I should take that for an evidence, which was none".<sup>7</sup> Calvinist insistence on the 'self-evidencing' nature of Scripture was in part a response to such anxieties. The lack of external proof of one's status was answered by a text that was supposed to supply its own corroboration. This displacement of the interpretative act from reader to text had conflicting implications. If it was a potential source of comfort for the weak believer / reader, it was also disempowering. Under the guise of a transparency that supposedly removed the semantic distance between interpreter and the thing interpreted, the Scriptures had a self-sufficiency that mirrored the solipsistic character of a Calvinist God who judged but withheld communication of that judgement. It was not clarity, but its absence, that fuelled experimental

<sup>3</sup> Martin Luther, 'Assertio omnium articularum M. Lutheri per bullam Leonis X. novissimam damnatorum' (1520), *D. Martin Luther's Werke*, 7:97, 23-24, trans. by and cited in Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther: An Introduction to his Life and Work* (Fortress Press: Philadelphia, 1986), p. 157. Skevington Wood points out that, for Luther, "the oneness of Scripture is bound up with the oneness of Christ and the oneness of faith". Skevington Wood, p. 151.

<sup>4</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, fol. 14<sup>r</sup>. See book one chapter seven on "by what testimonie the Scripture oughte to be established...that the authoritie therof may remaine certaine", fols 13<sup>v</sup> – 15<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849), pp. 275-358. On Whitaker's contribution to the doctrine, see John R. Knott, *The Sword of the Spirit: Puritan Responses to the Bible* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 34.

<sup>6</sup> John Owen, *Of the Divine Originall, Authority, Self-evidencing Light, and Power of the Scriptures* (Oxford: Tho. Robinson, 1659), pp. 33, 66.



Calvinist hermeneutics. Human attempts at interpretation might interfere with the process of autopistos, and thus risked aligning themselves with doubt – to doubt was not simply to have an incomplete faith, but to enter into a different relationship with truth. It was the persistent endeavour to read the unreadable, to intervene in the production of a meaning that was concealed.

The desire both to read, and to renounce reading, was met by the application of autopistos through the technique of collation. Biblical passages were compared with one another in order to bind disparate elements into a unity that subsumed any connotations at variance with itself.<sup>8</sup> As with the doctrine of autopistos, the practice of collation was embraced by experimental Calvinists. For example, the Presbyterian Robert Ferguson (who frequently preached with Owen<sup>9</sup>) remarked that “God hath so tempered the Scripture, that by the use of a Phrase in one place, light is reflected on the meaning of it in another”<sup>10</sup>. Collation encouraged the reader’s active engagement with the text, yet was nonetheless driven by an ideology of textual self-sufficiency. Luther had earlier described collation in terms that are revealing:

The safest of all methods for discerning the meaning of scripture is to work for it by drawing together and scrutinising passages...in a right and proper way.<sup>11</sup>

Interpretation was considered hazardous; collation provided a rubric for a way of reading that could not threaten the autonomy of the text. The criteria for ‘right and proper’ collation were left obscure,<sup>12</sup> but the importance of memory in allowing lexical echoes and associations to surface was likely to produce a dual psychological experience of passivity and involvement – an ambivalence related to the fundamental Calvinist paradox that man has no free will yet he is responsible, and to the ongoing theological controversies over grace and works discussed in the previous chapter. The contradiction

<sup>7</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, sig. A6<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Assimilation of difference is indeed fundamental to the ontology of a book which “owes its very origins to intertextuality”: a palimpsest of texts and translations, the Bible is underpinned by a structure of progressive revelation whereby the Old Testament is subsumed into the New. Stephen Prickett, ‘The Changing of the Host: Translation and Linguistic Theory’, in *Translating Religious Texts: Translation, Transgression and Interpretation*, ed. by David Jasper (London: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 4–20, (p. 4).

<sup>9</sup> DNB, VI, 1214–1217. Ferguson’s experimental Calvinism was expressed in his book *Justification onely upon a satisfaction; or the Necessity and Verity of the Satisfaction of Christ as the only ground of Remission of Sin, asserted and opened against the Socinians* (London, [n. pub.], 1668).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Ferguson, *The Interest of Reason in Religion with the Import and Use of Scripture-Metaphors; and the Nature of the Union betwixt Christ and Believers* (London: Dorman Newman, 1675), p. 352.

<sup>11</sup> Skevington Wood, p. 162.

<sup>12</sup> Jeremy Taylor commented in 1647: “What was intended for a remedy, becomes the promoter of our disease, and our meat becomes the matter of sickness: And the mischief is, the wit of man cannot find a remedy for it; for there is *no rule no limit, no certain principle*, by which all men may be guided to a certain and so infallible an Interpretation, that he can with any equity prescribe to others to believe his Interpretations in place of controversy or ambiguity.” [My italics]. Earlier he observes that “there is no help for us, but good fortune or absolute predestination; for by choyce and industry, no man can secure himselfe that in all the mysteries of Religion taught in Scripture he shall certainly understand and explicitly believe that sense, that God intended.” Jeremy Taylor, *A Discourse on the Liberty of Propheying* (London: n. pub, 1647), pp. 80, 61. Taylor, of course, was favoured by Laud and was not part of the experimental Calvinist community; nonetheless his identification of the lack of ‘rule’ or ‘principle’ for interpretation of Scripture articulates an anxiety many felt but could not express.



of a doctrine of preparation within a framework of predestination meant that the diligent work of collation often gave way to a passive experience of assault. As with the paradoxical emergence of a work ethic from a theology that stressed justification by faith alone, so collation turned reading into labour yet rendered it inert. Scripture read itself; human industry replaced human interpretation. Interpretation and morality were linked through work that was in itself judicious, and the surest route towards 'right and proper' reading. Whereas twentieth century modes of critically attentive reading often carry an expectation of "unravelling a text's apparent unities"<sup>13</sup>, experimental Calvinist readers aspired to bind multiplicity into a single truth. Their labour of reading was reading as reinforcement.

The doctrine of autopistos, and its application through collation, furthered the semiotics of a theology that simultaneously impelled and frustrated the reading of one's spiritual status. Reading was supposed to provide a route towards assurance, but at the same time the figure of the reader was an object of suspicion. Ambivalence shadowed the experimental Calvinist theology of meaning, but a more immediate breakdown in confidence occurred when the Bible failed to live up to Luther's claim that "Holy Scripture is in excellent agreement with itself and is uniformly consistent everywhere."<sup>14</sup> Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* is the most well-known account of the anguish suffered when a reader found that "the Scriptures could not agree in the salvation of my soul"<sup>15</sup>, but seemed to promise salvation and damnation alternately. There are countless similar accounts of collation 'gone wrong' in other experimental Calvinist life-writings; Bunyan was one of many for whom the wavering nature of Calvinist doubt, 'staggering between assent and dissent',<sup>16</sup> was reproduced in an inability to collate conflicting scriptures.

Luther had been alert to potential difficulties in the practice of collation, and had developed a range of strategies to forestall uncertainty. The most basic device (but, in some respects, the hardest to refute) was to ignore any discrepancies. Luther admitted that the "uniform consistency" of Scripture might sometimes appear otherwise, and offered a simple solution:

If one account in Holy Writ is at variance with another and it is impossible to solve the difficulty, just dismiss it from your mind.<sup>17</sup>

In so doing, he was adapting a strategy that he ascribed to his adversaries who focused on one biblical passage to the exclusion of others. Like the ostrich "which thinks it is totally covered when

<sup>13</sup> Kevin Hart, 'The Poetics of the Negative', in *Reading the Text: Biblical Criticism and Literary Theory*, ed. by Stephen Prickett (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 281-340 (p.300).

<sup>14</sup> Martin Luther, 'Lectures on Genesis', in *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav J. Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann, 55 vols (Philadelphia and St. Louis, 1955), III, 247. [Hereafter referred to as *Luther's Works*.]

<sup>15</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> William Ames, *Conscience with the Power and the Causes Thereof* (London: [n.pub], 1639), p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> Luther, 'Sermons on the Gospel of St. John', trans. by Martin H. Bertram, in *Luther's Works*, XX, 218-19.



its head is covered with some branch”<sup>18</sup>, one could make the problem go away by choosing not to see it. John Goodwin took the ‘ostrich technique’ a stage further in *The Divine Authority of Scriptures Asserted* (1647). It was not just for the reader to disregard instances where “Scripture seems to rise up against Scripture”; the fact that Scripture *itself* ignored its own discrepancies was evidence of its truth. Scripture had “a majestique kinde of security under many seeming contradictions”, and was “undaunted, untroubled, unappal’d” by its own antagonisms. That was “a signe that their confidence is divine, and that their security...is the security of God”<sup>19</sup>. The tautologous nature of the argument, where premise and conclusion were one and the same, reveals how the ‘unity of truth’ could be deployed as a device to preclude debate. Luther, Goodwin and others were adapting the familiar device of the utility of obscurity as a principle of reading – a paradox truly worthy of Calvinism.<sup>20</sup> The persistence of experimental Calvinist anxiety was the failure to adopt such techniques of reading; weak belief was the inability to defer meaning, to ignore contradictory texts in one’s narrative of salvation.

The practice of collation meshed with the ‘dualist-monist’ dynamic<sup>21</sup> of a theology rooted in paradox but could not resolve it. Both the theology, and the hermeneutics it engendered, shaped the dysfunctional reading experiences of experimental Calvinists as recorded in their autobiographical writings. The theology of double predestination had dictated a compulsive searching for proof of one’s status in spite, or indeed, *because* of, the impossibility of finding resolution. Far from providing a release into assurance, it seemed that Scripture repeated the same dynamic, demanding repeated acts of reading and re-reading. More interesting than the many records of failed collation, however, are the strategies adopted by experimental Calvinist autobiographers in their struggle to renegotiate their relationship with the Word. Subsequent chapters will examine how they were to use the act of inscription to try to convert their reading into something that was itself more capable of securing conversion.

<sup>18</sup> Luther, ‘Sermons on the Gospel of St. John’, in *Luther’s Works*, XX, 218-19.

<sup>19</sup> John Goodwin, *The Divine Theory of the Scriptures Asserted* (London: n.pub, 1647), pp. 37,58. John Goodwin had early inclined towards Independency under the influence of John Cotton, but his views on justification (most notably expressed in a work entitled *Redemption Redeemed*) led to accusations of Arminianism. John Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed* (London: [n.pub.], 1651). Goodwin denied this and argued that Calvin bore him out on certain points, but nonetheless, his defence of general redemption means he cannot be considered an experimental Calvinist. However, his views on the security of Scripture are still pertinent here.

<sup>20</sup> Experimental Calvinists could also take refuge in the theory of ‘accommodation’ which arguably develops the notion of the utility of obscurity. The notion of accommodation supported the strategy of ignoring contradictions by positing – but postponing – their eventual assimilation. See John Milton, *Areopagitica*, (London: n.pub, 1644). The theory of accommodation also bolstered arguments for religious toleration: Jeremy Taylor argued that scriptural contradictions may have been left by God “as occasions and opportunities of our mutuall charity and toleration to each other, and humility in ourselves, rather then the repositories of Faith, and furniture of Creeds, and Articles of belief”, Jeremy Taylor, *A Discourse of the Liberty of Prophesying*, p. 59. If an acceptance of reading as deferral was key to concepts of toleration, one would expect such ideas to take on even greater urgency for experimental Calvinists persecuted after the Restoration. However, notions of deferred meaning were hard to reconcile with experimental Calvinist concepts of saving reading as both the means and a sign of election.



Collation was problematic and offered no easy route towards assurance of one's status. However, just as experimental Calvinist hermeneutics (and faulty collation in particular) perpetuated anxieties over the status of one's soul, so they also fostered an unease about the status of the written word. If the relationship between passages of Scripture was fraught, the relationship between words and meaning was more so. The belief that all signs, words and things, point to God had been articulated by Augustine, but some experimental Calvinists found it harder to come to terms with his acceptance that God should have "generously and abundantly provided in the divine writing ...that the same words might be understood in various ways".<sup>22</sup> Robert Ferguson, for example, argued that

To assign a plurality of coordinate or Ambiguous senses to one and the same text, is the height of madness..and is indeed repugnant not only to the perspicuity of Scripture, but to the Unity of Truth.<sup>23</sup>

John Webster was another non-conformist who felt that if 'names', 'notions' and 'ideas of things'

Do not to an hair correspond with, and be identical one to the other, as punctually and truly as the impression in the wax agrees with the seal that instamped it, and as face answers face in a glass, then there is not absolute congruency betwixt the notion and the thing, the intellect and the thing understood, and it is no longer verity, but a ly, and a falsity.<sup>24</sup>

For such writers, the 'unity of truth' demanded an integral relationship between sign and signified. Other experimental Calvinists were more reconciled to the possibility that there might be no such correspondence. Henry Lukin, in *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture*, accepted that there could not be an essential congruency between name and thing, and argued that this was because there were simply not enough words to go round:

Words in all languages being of such various significations, and having several acceptions partly because things being so innumerable, and words being formed of a few letters, and uttered by some small change, and variation in the motions of the organs, and Instruments of speech, there cannot be a different word found for everything.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> On the 'dualist-monist dialectic' of Calvinism, see Carroll, *Puritan, Paranoid, Remissive*, p. 128. Carroll's argument is discussed in Chapter One, pp. 42-43.

<sup>22</sup> Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana*, trans. by D.W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis and New York: 1958) I, 7.

<sup>23</sup> Ferguson, *Interest of Reason*, p. 136.

<sup>24</sup> John Webster, *Academiæ Examē* (London: Giles Calvert, 1653), p. 29. Webster was a Non-conformist by 1648, but his theological position is hard to pin down; the *Dictionary of National Biography* observes disapprovingly that he "passed through many phases of religious conviction". *DNB*, XX, 1036. If Webster himself cannot strictly be classed among experimental Calvinists, nonetheless his linguistic attitudes represent a significant strand of thinking available to them.

<sup>25</sup> Henry Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture* (London: [n.pub.], 1669), p. 135. Lukin was a 'Nonconformist of Puritan opinions', *DNB*, XII, 266. He resigned his living in 1659 and was travelling in France at the time of the ejection in 1662; subsequently he was licensed to preach at Matching in 1672. A.G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), p. 331.



Lukin was suggesting that words could not, of themselves, generate a sufficient range of signification. At the same time, however, Lukin was troubled by the observation that “sometimes there is a *Redundancy*, or superfluity of words in Scripture”; (today deconstructionists might argue that Lukin was responding to a hyper-textuality in the Bible derived from the inaccessibility of its ultimate referent).<sup>26</sup> Lukin’s sense of both the paucity and the excess of words seems contradictory, but in fact both bespeak an anxiety at the detachment of meaning from language, and the onus which that placed upon the reader. Experimental Calvinist anxieties over the relationship between word and meaning were in part a nervous attempt to disown the responsibility of interpretation. In a world of absolute truth or falsehood, the acceptance of ‘various signification’ hinted at relativity and opened the door to doubt. While such apprehensions may have destabilised notions of the Bible as a source of assurance, of more immediate impact upon experimental Calvinist autobiographers was the implication that meaning resided, at least in part, with the reader, and moreover, that there might be more than one mode of reading.

Set against the fears of men such as Ferguson and Webster was the reality of a Bible that had gone through numerous translations, and which frequently used figurative and allegorical modes of representation. The issue of translation was implicated in debates over the authorship of the scriptures that had troubled Calvin himself,<sup>27</sup> and which continued to nag at later Calvinists. Owen was adamant that the prophets had been divinely inspired, stating that

The Word that came unto them, was a *Book* which they took *in*, and gave *out* without any alteration of one tittle [sic] or syllable.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Lukin, p. 145. An assimilation of difference that impels inexhaustible reading would be termed by Derrida an act of *differance* - a displacement and deferral of meaning in response to an ultimate indecipherability. My argument is that even while experimental Calvinists remained firmly committed to a God who was the ultimate guarantee or ‘referent’ beyond language, that belief could not dispel the hermeneutic anxiety many suffered.

<sup>27</sup> See Calvin, *Institutes*, fols 20<sup>r</sup> – 21<sup>r</sup>. The divine inspiration of Scripture was a matter on which Calvin had been ambiguous, as can be seen from the opposite conclusions critics manage to draw from his work. Intention could not be separated from concepts of authorship – an area on which Calvin was ambivalent. Richard C. Prust provides a useful summary: “One of the most controversial issues dividing Calvin scholars has to do with Calvin’s understanding of God as the author of Scripture. Specifically the issue is this: did Calvin believe that the Scriptures were verbally inspired in such a way that they can be identified without qualification with God’s Word and therefore held to be infallible?” Richard C. Prust, ‘Was Calvin a Biblical Literalist’, in *Calvin and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Richard C. Gamble (New York and London: Garland Pub. Inc., 1992), pp. 380-397 (p. 380). For the weak believer, the point was not only the infallibility of Scripture, but also its potential as a vehicle for the proximity of an otherwise remote God. Hans-Joachim Kraus argues that for Calvin the Bible was, as stated in the *Institutes* “something dead and powerless”: “Only when we come to the knowledge (through the inner witness of the Holy Spirit) that God himself is speaking to us through the Scripture, do we begin to experience its power and to perceive and confess its reality. That is, the Bible is not ascribed any status as an inspired work. In and through it communication took place and still takes place.” Hans-Joachim Kraus, ‘Calvin’s Exegetical Principles’, in *Calvin and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Richard C. Gamble, pp. 2-12 (p. 4). Knowledge of the Holy Spirit precedes ‘right understanding’. It is the reader, not the text, that must be ‘inspired’; to doubt is to read without inspiration. A.D.R. Polman takes the opposite view of Calvin’s position: “Calvin professes the authorship of the Holy Spirit with respect to the entire Bible, even including language, style and diction. The inspiration of the Spirit pertains...to the smallest details. The writers of the Bible are repeatedly referred to as secretaries, clerks, amanuenses, and pens of the Spirit, who accurately reproduce that which is dictated to them.” A.D.R. Polman, ‘Calvin on the Inspiration of Scripture’, in *Calvin and Hermeneutics*, ed. by Richard C. Gamble, pp. 291-307 (p. 97).

<sup>28</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Originall*, p. 9.



If the inspired status of Scripture were to be preserved, it seemed that its translation into the vernacular, and the differences between editions, must partake of renewed animation each time in affirmation of the identity between God's intention, or meaning, and language. If not, the potential for conflicting readings of Scripture was exacerbated to the point where, Owen feared, its very authority might be called into question:

Of all the Inventions of Sathan to draw off the minds of men from the Word of God, this of decrying the authority of the Originalls seems to me the most pernicious... in the daies wherein we live, it breaks out in a greater flame; they now print the originall itself, and defame it; gathering up translations of all sorts, and setting them up in competition with it.<sup>29</sup>

Owen got round the problem by arguing that

Where there is any variety it is alwayes in things of lese, indeed of no importance. God by his Providence preserving the whole entire, suffered this lesser variety to fall out, in or among the copies we have, for the quickning and exercising of our diligence in our search into his Word.<sup>30</sup>

However Owen was still evading the more fundamental variance between word and meaning implied by translation, an issue that John Goodwin could not ignore:

"To affirm that [translations] are all and everyone of them the word of God...is to make the word of God to differ from itself, yea to make it incoherent, and in some things inconsistent with itself."<sup>31</sup>

Inconsistency and lack of coherence were the essence of a theology rooted in paradox; Goodwin was alarmed to see these features replicated in the language of a Bible that was supposed to provide release from Calvinist circumlocution. George Steiner has suggested that there is a "necessary unknowing at the heart of translation" and that, furthermore, "every semiotic exchange, every communication and reception of meaning entails the model of translation."<sup>32</sup> Goodwin was responding not only to the potential removal of Word from word brought about by translation, but also to the underlying implication, at odds with the logocentric ideal, that an absence dictated the very conditions of language and of reading. That sense of absence was constitutive of Calvinist anxiety over salvation; it was indeed an 'unknowing'.

<sup>29</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Originall*, p. 5<sup>r</sup>, 6<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Originall*, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> John Goodwin, *Divine Authority*, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> George Steiner, Foreword to *Translating Religious Texts – Translation, Transgression and Interpretation* ed. David Jasper, (London: Macmillan, 1993), (pp.ix-xiv), pp. ix -x.



If translations of the Bible suggested that words might have an arbitrary relationship with meaning, that placed an unwelcome responsibility firmly back in the hands of the reader. It also gave weight to other suspicions that modes of reading were not neutral, but made an integral contribution to the production of meaning. Luther had implied as much when he argued that

The Christian reader should make it his first task to seek out the literal sense, as they call it. For it alone is the whole substance of faith and Christian theology; it alone holds the ground in trouble and trial.<sup>33</sup>

Luther incautiously coupled his insistence on the literal sense with a condemnation of allegory as “monkey tricks” and “loony talk”, the mere “froth” of Scripture<sup>34</sup> – an antagonism that proved to be unsustainable. The friction between ‘literal’ and ‘figurative’ modes of interpretation derived from unease at a re-location of meaning that seemed to reform not only the relationship between sign and signified, but also the contract between God, truth and the reader. There is not space here to consider in detail Puritan debates on literal versus figurative readings of Scripture, but in two respects they reveal an inter-relationship between the theology of double predestination and experimental Calvinist hermeneutics. One has been discussed by Thomas H. Luxon in *Literal Figures – Puritan Allegory and the Reformation Crisis in Representation*, in which he details

the dilemma of a Protestantism that insists on literalism and personal experimentalism even as it remains committed to an allegorical understanding of reality – this world and the more real of the next... The real, the true, and the literal have all been evacuated from this world and projected into the next...<sup>35</sup>

If what is literal in this world is merely an allegorical figure of reality in the next, then allegory in this world is a more real “equivocation” which acknowledges that fact. In this schema, the reader is as much a sign as the text. One’s status as a signifier, literal or allegorical - and one’s ability to discern what kind of sign one is - is entirely dependent on whether one is elect or reprobate. “The damned live an allegory under the delusion of self-sameness, and the redeemed live a life of represented being, a life of deferred being.”<sup>36</sup> Here right reading is not a preparation towards

<sup>33</sup> Luther, ‘Lectures on Deuteronomy’, trans. by Richard R. Caemmerer, in *Luther’s Works*, IX, 24.

<sup>34</sup> Luther, in *Works of Martin Luther*, ed. by Henry E. Jacobs (Philadelphia, 1915-32) III, 334. [Hereafter referred to as *Works of Martin Luther*.]

<sup>35</sup> Thomas H. Luxon, *Literal Figures – Puritan Allegory and the Reformation Crisis in Representation*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 24, 66. Luxon argues that there is no difference between Typology and Allegory: “Typology ...is allegory that denies it is allegory...[it is] not a different mode of representation, but rather a perceived difference in the ontological status of the figures and the thing figured”. Elsewhere Stephen Prickett traces the history of allegorical reading as a technique of appropriation: “the New Testament achieves what is, arguably, the most momentous act of appropriation in human history primarily by means of introducing a new critical theory, which, in effect, insists on a new way of reading all previous religious writings...with the coming of Christianity allegorical and figural interpretation was elevated...into a total and all-embracing theory of meaning”. Prickett, *Reading the Text*, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> Luxon, *Literal Figures*, p. 29. These issues came to the fore in disputes over pseudo-Christes such as that which flared up over William Franklin in 1649 (see Luxon, *Literal Figures*, pp. 5-22). Debates about the meaning of ‘Christ within’ were widespread – see, for example, the tract warfare between Bunyan and the Quakers: John Bunyan, *Some Gospel Truths*



conversion, but is conditional upon it. Uncertainties over definitions of literal and figurative readings led one back again to the murky waters of one's spiritual status.

The second element of such debates that reveals the proximity between hermeneutical and theological anxieties for the experimental Calvinist was the attempt made to resolve dispute by grounding the literal sense in divine authorial intention. (A concept of intentional fallacy - had it been 'invented' - in relation to the word of God would of course have been blasphemous.) The identification of literal meaning with intention persisted among experimental Calvinists. Robert Ferguson, for example, noted that

By the sense of the Scripture then, we Understand that which the Words according to the Intention of the Holy Ghost do signifie... I call that sense Literal which God doth intend in the Words, whether the Words be taken *Properly* or *Tropically*.<sup>37</sup>

It was, of course, the very *inability* to know God's intention that led so many to doubt their status, and which impelled their reading of the Bible in the first place. It is significant that the issue of intention lay at the crux of Protestant hermeneutics, and it should come as no surprise that it remains problematic. A transformation of the reader's relationship to Scripture was required, a transformation that effected the change from damnation to election and brought with it a sure ability to read aright. This operation depended upon the agency of the Holy Spirit through which God's intention was less a hermeneutical conundrum than the active manifestation of His will. Divine intention was the axis about which the poles of salvation and damnation turned; it was also the point at which word met with Word, Letter with Spirit. However, just as double predestination engendered a wavering faith, so the coupling of Letter and Spirit through intention was to be marked by instability.

### The Relationship between Word and Letter

Calvin had argued for the combined work of Letter and Spirit through the Word:

With a certaine mutuall knot the Lorde hath coupled together the assuraunce of his worde and of his spirite, so that perfecte reverence to the word doth then settle in our mindes when the holy Gost shineth upon us... God brought not abroad his word among men for a sodaine shew, meaning at the comming of his spirite by and by to take it away againe, but he after sent the same spirite with whose power he had distributed his word, to make an end of his worke with effectuall confirmation of his worde.<sup>38</sup>

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*Opened* (London: J. Wright the Younger, 1656); *A Vindication of Some Gospel Truths Opened* (London: Matthias Cowley, 1657); and Edward Burrough, *The True Faith of the Gospel of Peace Contended For* (London: Giles Calvert, 1656).

<sup>37</sup> Ferguson, *The Interest of Reason*, pp. 134 -5.

<sup>38</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, fol. 21<sup>r</sup>.



Ferguson implied that the Letter had an innate connection to the sense intended by its divine author:

the letter of the Bible without the genuine sense of it is not properly the Scripture; nor will it availe us to any end or purpose, more than the having a shell without a kernel. But...I know no greater disparagement that can be put upon the Bible...than to stile it, *a little Ink variously figured in a Book, or a few unsensed Characters*... If there be not a sense intrinsically included in every Word and sentence of the Scripture, he was ill employed that gave it forth.<sup>39</sup>

Experimental Calvinists, concerned to privilege grace above works, yet wary of the excess of enthusiasm displayed amongst sects who discarded the Letter entirely, continued to insist upon the integral relationship between hermeneutical and experiential readings of the Bible. As discussed in the introduction to this study, Owen tried to demonstrate it in terms of the action of the reader:

There is a spiritual saving understanding of the Mystery and Truths contained in the Scriptures; and a rational understanding of the words, and propositions, wherein those Mysteries and Truths, are contained and exhibited to us, (which is not a double, double, [sic] or twofold understanding of the Scriptures, but the same act of our mind under various qualifications is intended.<sup>40</sup>

Owen did not wish spiritual and rational understanding to bifurcate into two distinct ways of reading, but argued instead that both were essentially related, joined in a single 'act of mind'; his ideal of reading was grounded in the dualist-monist dialectic habitual to Calvinism. Just as reprobation was considered a necessary counterpart to grace, so rational reading was needed to define and guarantee a spiritual reading, and vice versa. However, it was the binary aspect that was inadvertently emphasised by the fall of a new page at a point which led to the customary reprinting of the adjoining text, in this case the word 'double'. This typographical accident gave unfortunate emphasis to the 'doubleness' of an understanding that Owen was trying to argue was single and entire.

While experimental Calvinists asserted a necessary integration between hermeneutical and experiential approaches to the Bible, in practice they found that relationship hard to sustain. Hermeneutics not only failed to provide access to assurance, but in fact perpetuated the anxiety of the doubtful reader, who might find conflicting indications of their status, who were uneasy about the status of the Letter of the Bible, and who could never be certain that their readings were not the delusions of the damned. Such difficulties lay behind a distrust of 'rational' approaches towards Scripture dating back to Luther, who had remarked that

<sup>39</sup> Ferguson, *Interest of Reason*, p. 129.

<sup>40</sup> John Owen, 'To the Christian Reader' in Lukin, *Introduction to Holy Scripture*, sig. A7.



there is no article that cannot be overthrown if it once comes to pass that reason intrudes and tries to speculate and learns to turn and twist the Scripture so that it agrees with its conclusions. That penetrates like a sweet poison.<sup>41</sup>

For Luther, such 'speculation' amounted to blasphemy, distorting the text as though it were like "a nose of wax".<sup>42</sup> Calvin was even more specific in condemning human reason as dangerous and counter-productive:

If then we wil provide wel for consciences, that they be not continually caryd about with unstedfast douting, nor may waver, nor stay at every small stop, this maner of perswasion must be fetched deper than from either the reasons, judgements or the conjectures of men, even from the secrete testimonie of the holy Ghoste.<sup>43</sup>

The distrust of reason persisted amongst experimental Calvinists to varying degrees, exacerbated by cultural trends towards what they perceived as moralism. John Webster observed that "reason is a monster, and the very root and ground of all infidelity"<sup>44</sup>. Robert Ferguson devoted a lengthy book to *The Interest of Reason in Religion with the Import & Use of Scripture-Metaphors; and the Nature of the Union betwixt Christ and Believers*. Ferguson, like so many readers of Scripture, got waylaid by hermeneutical issues: not until page 421 did he "come at length to the ventilation of that which I principally designed", and then it only took up half the space of what went before. However his argument firmly privileged spiritual irradiation over rational discernment:

The meer Rational mind may discern the literal Sense of Scripture propositions, but without a supernatural Irradiation from the Spirit of life, there can be no saving knowledge of them. The Spirit which breathed out the Scripture at first, is in this sense the only Interpreter of it.<sup>45</sup>

Reiterating the principle of autopistos, Ferguson implied that the reader was passive and had nothing to do with the real business of interpretation which could only be effected by the Spirit.

Saving reading was to be found neither in the shaky authority of the written text nor in the power of the reader, but in the operations of the mediating Spirit. In Samuel Petto's *The Voice of the Spirit*, the epistle 'To the Christian Reader' (written by Samuel Habergans and Edward Barker) stated that

The eternall decree of the great God about the everlasting state of soules in which they shall for ever abide...is registered in the booke of God, and to be opened at the great day; but at the present so hidden that by all that is before us, as that we cannot eyther know love or hatred, or what will be the sentence of the Judge of all the world upon a particular soule... Jesus...hath sent for that blessed Spirit which curiously,

<sup>41</sup> Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Samtliche Schriften* ed. Johann Georg Walch (Halle: 1739-53), IX, 950 (cited and translated in Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word*, p.150.) On Luther and reason, see Lohse, *Martin Luther*, p. 159.

<sup>42</sup> Luther, *Works of Martin Luther*, ed. by Jacobs, I, 367.

<sup>43</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, fol. 14<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Webster, p. 17.

<sup>45</sup> Ferguson, *Interest of Reason*, p. 144.



and exactly surveighs the very bottome Counsells of God, to make report of, and to witnesse unto Soules the precious Assurance of their Adoption.<sup>46</sup>

The passage suggests that the real book of God – the Book of Judgement – is beyond human scrutiny. The Spirit makes report of it at one remove through the Bible; text and reader are merely vessel and receptacle. That erosion of the autonomy of the reader lies behind the alignment of hermeneutical approaches with a corrupt reason, and the identification of affective engagement with saving reading. The ‘book’ of judgement, the ‘registering’ of spiritual accounts, and the mediating act of ‘witnessing’, belong to a visual realm associated with the economy of inscription. More commonly, however, the work of the Spirit was figured in oral / aural terms, in keeping with the logocentric tradition that privileged voice over letter. Hermeneutical approaches had called into question the authority of the Letter; the written word could be a trap, in which the strained relationship between sign and signified distanced the divine. Peggy Phelan in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (her seminal work on performance theory) argues that writing “relies on a substitutional economy in which equivalences are assumed and re-established.” In contrast to this, “performative speech acts refer only to themselves, they *enact* the activity the speech signifies”, and thus they remove any anxiety about the relationship between sign and signified.<sup>47</sup> The privileging of the spoken word made a natural counterpart to a more experiential approach, but it was to raise a new set of problems for experimental Calvinists hoping to read themselves into assurance.

Anxieties over the relationship between spoken word and prescribed text found most overt expression in disputes over the Book of Common Prayer. Independents objected outright to the formalism of a set liturgy which denied the exercise of grace;<sup>48</sup> Presbyterians tended to be more ambivalent. Many were not initially opposed to a liturgy as such, provided there was Scriptural authority for each of the ordinances, but, as Horton Davies argues in *Worship and Theology in England from Andrewes to Baxter and Fox, 1603-1690*,

in the common crucible of suffering under the Clarendon Code, the Presbyterians came to the Independent viewpoint on spontaneous prayer, probably very largely because the Book of Common Prayer became for both groups the very symbol of tyranny and the requirement of which had caused them to lose their livings in the Church of England.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, sig. A4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> Phelan, p. 149. Ferguson, writing from the experimental Calvinist perspective, also referred to writing as a “substitute” for, and “vicarious” of, speech. Ferguson, *Interest of Reason*, p. 129.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, John Owen, ‘A Discourse concerning Liturgies, and their Imposition’, in *Works*, XV, 3–55, (especially p. 52).

<sup>49</sup> Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England from Andrewes to Baxter and Fox, 1603-1690* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 405, 450. The Act of Uniformity’s requirement that ministers declare “unfeigned assent and consent” to everything in the book was to be a major stumbling block for those Presbyterians who aspired to an inclusive



Relations between the written and spoken word were also addressed in debates over the relative virtues of prepared and extempore sermons. In his work on *English Pulpit Oratory from Andrewes to Tillotson*, William Fraser Mitchell asserts that

throughout the whole century the Puritans favoured the carefully written sermon, delivered memoriter, although some of their number considered notes sufficient, and probably only wrote up their sermons for printing after they had been preached.<sup>50</sup>

In line with that argument, Graham Midgley disputes “the widely held belief that dissenting sermons were free and extempore effusions”, suggesting instead a broader range of practice.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless the relationship between text and speech remained a charged issue. Perkins had argued that excessive memorising “word for word” hindered the “holy motions of affections”<sup>52</sup> as though the temporal delay between conception and delivery (or re-delivery) of meaning broke the thread of feeling between intention and vocalisation. Intention, already identified as the essence of the literal sense in hermeneutical approaches to the Bible, and the source of much anxiety for the Calvinist keen to discern God’s judgement, was also considered vital to an experiential reading of the word. Spontaneity and sincerity were intrinsically related in the ‘performative’ Word – a Word that was alive because ‘live’. Bunyan observes that sometimes “a word cast in by the by hath done more execution in a sermon than all that was spoken besides”<sup>53</sup>, again suggesting that improvised language allowed more room for the transforming spirit. Experimental Calvinist attitudes towards preaching were informed by earlier reformed theology. In his epistle to *The Art of Prophesying* William Perkins stressed that sermons “serveth to accomplish the number of the Elect”.<sup>54</sup> They were considered an important means whereby weak believers could be brought through the Word to a stronger faith. (Bunyan, for example, considered his ministry “awakening and converting work”, and his *Last Sermon* called upon his congregation to ask themselves whether “they be born of God or not”.<sup>55</sup>) Of course preachers also had exegetical responsibilities, but their primary task was to excite the ‘affections’ of the congregation (preaching manuals offered guidance on how to go about the task<sup>56</sup>) in order to fulfil the experimental Calvinist model of saving reading.

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state church but who felt they had no alternative under such conditions other than dissent. See Davies, pp. 363–458 for discussion of the restored and revised Prayer Book, alternative puritan service books, and nonconformist worship.

<sup>50</sup> William Fraser Mitchell, *English Pulpit Oratory from Andrewes to Tillotson*, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), p. 26.

<sup>51</sup> Graham Midgley, ‘Introduction’, *Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, ed. by Roger Sharrock, 13 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), V, p. xxii.

<sup>52</sup> William Perkins, ‘The Art of Prophesying’, in *Workes*, II, 670.

<sup>53</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 83.

<sup>54</sup> Perkins, ‘The Art of Prophesying’, in *Workes*, II, 651.

<sup>55</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 83; Bunyan, ‘Last Sermon’, in *Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, V, p. 93. Only one copy of the first edition of the *Last Sermon* is known to have survived (London: George Larkin, 1689), and is in the possession of the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.

<sup>56</sup> For example, autopistos was fundamental to the sermonic enterprise, with all the ambivalences earlier discussed. (Preachers were advised to equip themselves with ‘Reconcilers’, books dedicated to the purpose of resolving “such Scriptures as seem opposite to one another”. John Wilkins, *Ecclesiastes, or a Discourse concerning the Gift of Preaching as it Falls Under the Rule of Art*, 3rd edn (London: Samuel Gellibrand, 1651), p. 39. Another hermeneutical feature



## The Experimental Calvinist Model of Saving Reading

The key to “gracious speech”<sup>57</sup> was an unimpeded flow of communication between the heart of the speaker and that of the listener. Here one comes up against the “rebellious and vagabond”<sup>58</sup> nature of reading in all its irretrievability. Preaching was reading as communal event, in contrast to the private, interior encounter with a book.<sup>59</sup> Nonetheless, it remained individuated – and isolated – by the spiritual receptivity of the listener, who might or might not be moved by the Spirit, and whose failure to be so might be a sign of reprobation. Finding a point of critical access to this performative reading is problematic. It is no longer possible to adopt the complacency of Mitchell’s argument that

The carefully written sermon read by the preacher must take first place in point of accuracy. All other types of printed sermons...must be regarded as receding farther and farther from the sermon as delivered...The written sermon, printed after delivery...from the student’s standpoint, is certainly the most satisfactory. We feel that we know all about it, as we cannot feel that we know about the other forms of sermons.<sup>60</sup>

Such notions of accuracy are of course simplistic, designed to gratify our need to “feel that we know all about it” rather than to reflect the elusive, complex, and critically challenging reality of the live event. If one accepts that the most important feature of the sermon from the experimental Calvinist’s perspective was its power to assist conversion, one might argue that accounts of sermons left by members of the congregation would be equally, if not more, ‘accurate’, than the original texts, being closer to the experiential end result. Mitchell comments that “from their earliest years children of the period were encouraged to memorise carefully or preserve by means of notes the sermons which they heard”<sup>61</sup>, and Kathleen M. Swaim observes that “auditors were encouraged to take notes of sermons

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associated with dissenting preaching was the extensive dividing and re-dividing of passages from Scripture; single words spawned lengthy paragraphs of analysis. That density was a form of ‘hypertextuality’ or, in its oral form, an energised verbosity. A complex response to the amplitude of God’s word, and its inaccessibility, it enacted that very dichotomy. Elucidation could tip over into obsfucation, and ‘openings’ recede as sprawling sentences interposed themselves between auditor (or reader) and meaning. An artillery of *words* attempted to capture the essence of *the Word*, multiple definitions reaching after, yet deferring, truth. Passages were illuminated through extended metaphors termed ‘similitudes’: like and unlike, they bespoke the ambivalence in attitudes towards the unity of meaning and the relationship between sign and signified. On seventeenth-century critiques of ‘dividing’, see Graham Midgeley, ‘Introduction’, *Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, V, pp. xxix –xxx.

<sup>57</sup> Perkins, ‘Art of Prophecyng’, in *Workes*, II, 670.

<sup>58</sup> Chartier, *Order of Books*, p. viii.

<sup>59</sup> Chartier identifies the interiorization of text, and the withdrawal of the body, as one of three major oppositions in the history of reading. (The other two “cleavages” are between an intensive reverential reading of a small number of texts, and an extensive, nonchalant reading that consumes many texts; and between private, solitary reading, and collective reading.) Chartier, *Order of Books*, p. 17.

<sup>60</sup> Mitchell, p. 15-16.

<sup>61</sup> Mitchell, p. 31.



for subsequent repetition and discussion within individual households”.<sup>62</sup> Diaries, conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies also provide accounts of the sermonic word from the hearer’s point of view. The reader as ‘listener’ was not as passive as might be supposed, and their experience of the live Word was often refracted through inscription – a process that could itself be problematic (as in the case of the Presbyterian autobiographer Joseph Barrett, discussed in chapter six). Furthermore, preachers, as agents of saving reading, left their own records of anxiety.<sup>63</sup> However, while such archives might offer a different route by which to explore the difficulties of sermonic discourse for the weak believer, they are still the determinate residue of an irrecoverable moment. It remains the case that writing about a live event necessarily changes it, and it is actually this very problem that will reveal most about the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading.

If the Spirit was the mediating force between God’s inaccessible Book of Judgement and the trembling experimental Calvinist, the preacher was the conduit for that presence. However, his role in that process was uncertain, and the task of effecting saving reading was the source of some concern. Just as hermeneutical difficulties had revolved around an ambivalent attitude to the power of the reader, so the contribution of the preacher was unclear. Manuals gave advice on posture, gesture, facial expression and intonation, suggesting that preaching was, at least in part, a matter of technique.<sup>64</sup> The presence of the Spirit, it seemed, was also dependent on the ‘stage presence’ of the speaker. Tensions between technique and grace echoed that of the uneasy relationship between preparation and predestination that had shadowed hermeneutical approaches to the Word. That ambivalence persisted in the disputes over lay and ordained preaching that divided Presbyterians and Congregationalists. Congregationalists favoured lay preaching on the grounds that not ordination, but “Christ (by gospel rules) warranteth and giveth the Authority or power to gifted persons to preach”, yet one of the supporting arguments in a work on the subject was that “preaching gifts are not to be improved, unless there is preaching.”<sup>65</sup> Most fundamental, however, was the spiritual frame of the preacher.

<sup>62</sup> Kathleen M. Swaim, *Pilgrim’s Progress, Puritan Progress: Discourses and Contexts*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 109.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Isaac Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 88.

<sup>64</sup> Manuals such as Perkins’s ‘Art of Prophesying’ offered practical guidance to those who felt their performance lacking. Perkins advised preachers to cultivate “That gravitee in the gesture of the body, which may grace the messenger of God. It is fit therefore, that the trunke or stalke of the bodie being erect and quiet, all the other parts, as the arme, the hand, the face and eyes have such motions, as may expresse and (as it were) utter the godly affections of the heart. The lifting up of the eye and the hand signifieth confidence... The casting down of the eyes signifying sorrow and heavinesse”. It was an attempt to construct a language of presence through gesture, but Perkins found himself unable to complete his semaphore of the soul. Instead he advised his readers to learn by watching the techniques of others: “Concerning the gesture, other precepts cannot be delivered; only, let the example of the gravest ministers in this kinde bee in stead of a Rule. Perkins, ‘Art of Prophesying’, in *Workes*, II, 672. In *Ecclesiastes*, John Wilkins gave advice on intonation, advising preachers to avoid extremes of “boldnesse” or “fear” and instead cultivate “modesty” and “gravity” in their elocution. Wilkins, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 132.

<sup>65</sup> John Martin, Samuel Petto, Frederick Woodal, *The Preacher Sent: Or, a Vindication of the Liberty of Publick Preaching, by some men not ordained* (London: Livewell Chapman, 1658) pp. 40, 43.



It was assumed that the preacher needed to nourish a connection between his own spiritual state and his spoken words if he was to serve as a successful channel for the saving Spirit of assurance. Bunyan, for example, records his anxiety at that responsibility, noting how on one occasion he found himself

so blinded, and so estranged from the things I have been speaking, and have also been so straitened in my speech, as to utterance before the people, that I have been as if I had not known or remembered what I have been about; or as if my head had been in a bag all the time of the exercise.<sup>66</sup>

The difficulty of keeping one's attention in the present went beyond the uneasy tension between memory and spontaneity in performance, and had far-reaching implications. To open oneself to sound was also to live and experience the moment – Walter Ong has argued that “involvement with sound is involvement with the present”.<sup>67</sup> If the oral *is* presence, a condition of that is that it exists only in the present. Its transience constantly alludes to and invites absence – “Sound perishes each instant that it lives”.<sup>68</sup> The problematics of presence were central to Calvinism – the visitation of the Spirit was the essence of assurance, its elusiveness the essence of doubt – and the logocentric emphasis on the oral accommodated and furthered that dynamic. Oral sermon delivery provided an opportunity for an experiential, transforming reading of the Word, yet orality, and the experience of grace that was delivered through it, were characterised by impermanence. Regular repetition of the event might be a strategic response (much as biblical hypertextuality compelled an inexhaustible reading) but the essential temporality of the live experience remained. Peggy Phelan remarks that “Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity, becomes itself through disappearance”.<sup>69</sup> It is a statement of peculiar resonance for this enquiry. Experimental Calvinist subjectivity was closely identified with the status of the soul and thus in a very real sense was founded upon ‘disappearance’, for that status was often hidden or only momentarily glimpsed. Essentially unstable, it was always in pursuit of the vanishing point of assurance on a horizon before or behind. The oral performance of the sermon word was the perfect vehicle, not for grace, but for anxiety.

The spoken word, rather than the written, was for experimental Calvinists the site of saving reading, but the work of the Spirit was most often conceived of in terms of an ‘interior voice.’ Just as inscription was considered a trace of the oral, so external vocalisation was secondary to an inner voice that was the ultimate union of meaning and expression. Augustine had argued that the inner word “is begotten from the knowledge that continues in the mind, when that same knowledge is

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<sup>66</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 84.

<sup>67</sup> Ong, *Presence of the Word*, p. 111.

<sup>68</sup> Ong, *Presence of the Word*, p. 130.



spoken [dicitur] inwardly according as it really is." The interior word is one with the mind's knowledge. Augustine suggested that the only way to heal the rift between language and meaning was through love ['caritas']:

Therefore love [amor]...conjoins our word [verbum] and the mind from which it is conceived, and without any confusion binds itself as a third with them, in an incorporeal embrace. ..A word, then... is knowledge together with love. Whenever, then, the mind knows and loves itself, its word is joined to it by love. And since it loves knowledge and knows love, both the word is in love and love is in the word, and both are in him who loves and speaks [dicit].<sup>70</sup>

Luther's distinction between the 'external and internal perspicuity' of the Scripture was indebted to Augustine's notion of an interior voice:

The perspicuity of Scripture is twofold: The first is external, and relates to the ministry of the Word; the second concerns the knowledge of the heart. If you speak of internal perspicuity, the truth is that nobody who has not the spirit of God sees a jot of what is in the Scriptures. All men have their hearts darkened...They do not believe in God, nor do they believe that they are God's creatures, nor anything else...The Spirit is needed for the understanding of all Scripture and every part of Scripture.<sup>71</sup>

Luther's model of interior and exterior suggests that 'right understanding' is brought about by a *union* of reader, Spirit and text; a way of reading that excluded interpretation as reader and text dissolved into one. The Spirit (when and if it comes) takes possession of the reader who responds with abandonment: Luther wrote that "faith surrenders itself captive to the Word of Christ"<sup>72</sup> and observed that the Spirit

Makes me spiritual too. The Word is spiritual and I also become spiritual: for He inscribes it in my heart, and then, in brief, all is Spirit.<sup>73</sup>

Self, inscription and Spirit merge. Calvin echoes him, stating that "they whom the holy ghost hath inwardly taught, doe wholly reſte uppon the Scripture".<sup>74</sup> The insistence on the interiority of saving reading persisted among experimental Calvinists such as Samuel Petto, who argued that the

<sup>69</sup> Phelan, p. 146.

<sup>70</sup> Augustine, *On the Trinity*, trans. by Arthur West Haddan, rev. by W.G.T. Shedd, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1974), pp. 131-32.

<sup>71</sup> Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, p. 73.

<sup>72</sup> Luther, 'Sermo Dominica XX. post Trinitat', in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, I, 87; trans. by and cited in Skevington Wood, p. 120.

<sup>73</sup> Luther, 'Sermons on the Gospel of St. John', trans. by Martin H. Bertram, in *Luther's Works*, XXIII, 175.

<sup>74</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, fol. 15<sup>r</sup>.



witnessings of the Spirit “maketh the word without a voyce within: by the effectual application of it to a particular soule”.<sup>75</sup>

The witnessings of the Spirit, are not to the outward ear, but to the heart; the Spirit maketh report of Divine Mercy to the inner man: the way of its witnessing, is not externall, by an audible voyce, but internall, by secret whisperings to the soule. Not by outward expressions, but by inward, unspeakable inspirations.<sup>76</sup>

Petto explains the experiential transformation wrought by the Spirit:

The Word telleth us what Faith is, and the Spirit worketh and acteth faith in us, and by its Irradiations, helpeth us to see it in ourselves, and to say [but I beleieve] and then the Conclusion followeth from the Word, *Therefore I shall be Saved*<sup>77</sup>

Again Petto reiterated the union that took place through “a double or Twin-testimony” of “the Spirit of God” and “Our Spirit”: “It beareth witness...together with, rather than [to] our Spirit” (his square brackets).<sup>78</sup> In the experiential model of reading the Spirit collapsed the gap between interpreter and interpreted, and reading was no longer hermeneutical but experiential; assurance was not sought but lived.<sup>79</sup>

The union of text and reader through the mediating influence of the Holy Ghost promised assurance. However, the reader remained a passive partner in the seduction by the Spirit, and “if God does not open and explain Holy Writ, no one can understand it; it will remain a closed book, enveloped in darkness”.<sup>80</sup> One could not even begin to try and interpret a book that remained shut. The ability to read aright had become not only a means towards saving faith, but also a mark of it. One’s membership of an elect body of readers was supposed to be incontrovertible. Petto argued in *The Voice of the Spirit* that

The Spirit by a secret touch irresistably striketh the soule into such a cleare, firme, and strong apprehensions and perswasions of its adoption, that...it cannot but say, as Job.19.25. I know – or as Romans 8.38. I am perswaded.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, p. 25.

<sup>76</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, p. 3.

<sup>77</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, p. 24.

<sup>78</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, p. 3.

<sup>79</sup> The receiver of Grace is initiated into a new language – the ‘language of Canaan’. Kathleen M. Swaim argues that it is “the mode of discourse to be enjoyed by those saints when the Scripture promises are fulfilled”, a discourse that uses familiar words “with a new and illuminated sense that takes into account not just words but grace, not just law but gospel... At its extreme, conversion amounts to a reversal of meaning as of values, even a belief that the spiritual sense is normative and that socially constituted proper meaning is derivative.” Swaim, p. 72.

<sup>80</sup> Martin Luther, ‘Psalm 68’, trans. by Martin H. Bertram, in *Luther’s Works*, XIII, 17. Milton had suggested the dubious consolation that “It is only to those who perish that the Scriptures are obscure.” ‘A Treatise on Christian Doctrine’, in *The Prose Works of John Milton* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1861), IV, p. 442.

<sup>81</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, p. 71.



Petto's position wavers however, and elsewhere in his book he admits that the Spirit may not always function "by such invincible operations as doe not leave the soule to freedome whether it will owne them or not" but may sometimes act "in a more milde, gentle, and secret indiscernable way":

Christians thinke to have assurance all at once, upon a sudden, and are apt to be very much troubled if it commeth not in by the lumpe. Whereas the will of God is, to let it in sometimes by little and little; and the soule may be a long time in attaining it.<sup>82</sup>

As soon as the operations of the Spirit become 'indiscernible' the imperative to interpret or 'read', rather than simply feel them, is rekindled, and experience itself is compromised. Owen warned against "Enthusiasms, or immediate pretended infallible Inspirations", and made it clear that "the work of the Holy Spirit in Regeneration doth not consist in Enthusiasticall Raptures, Extasies, Voices, or anything of the like kind." He was adamant that the Spirit

Worketh nothing, nor any other way, nor by any other means, than what are determined and declared in the Word. By that therefore may, and must everything really belonging, or pretended to belong unto the Work of Regeneration, be tryed and examined.<sup>83</sup>

The conscientious Calvinist was required to re-read their experience of the Spirit by testing it against the Letter. The experience of assurance, the union of text and reader through the Spirit could not itself avoid renewed scrutiny and interrogation. Owen remarked:

Great variety there is also in the *perception* and understanding of the work itself, in them in whom it is wrought. For in itself it is secret and hidden, and in no wayes discoverable but by its causes and effects.

He acknowledged that

In the Minds and Consciences of some this is made known by infallible Signs and Tokens..And many are in the dark as to their own condition in this Matter all their dayes.<sup>84</sup>

The language of judgement was again aligned with visual (rather than oral) signification and with difficulties in apprehension. The Spirit was supposed to make all clear but in practice, as already discussed, "the uncertaintie about the witness, may create as much dissatisfaction as anything else; yea, it raiseth a new ground of perplexitie".<sup>85</sup> There was a temptation to question whether what one heard was truly God's voice when it might only have been what Bunyan termed the "desperate

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<sup>82</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>83</sup> Owen, *Pneumatologia*, pp. 186-187.

<sup>84</sup> Owen, *Pneumatologia*, p. 177.

<sup>85</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, p. 71.



Spirit of delusion".<sup>86</sup> Once the moment of Grace has faded, it is all too easy for doubt to encroach upon it: when the "Spirit hath suspended its operations", the Christian is "ready to throw all away againe, and say O I thought I had seen God in such a way, and heard his voyce, and felt his love; but now I feare I was mistaken"<sup>87</sup>. Petto writes at length of the short duration of 'witnessings' for weak believers, whose "great suspition which they have over their owne hearts" soon deprives them of confidence.<sup>88</sup> Owen also described the "Spiritual desertions" which resulted in obsfucation:

Some on whom He hath been bestowed...He *utterly deserts* and gives them up to themselves and their own hearts lusts...all their Gifts dry up and wither; their light goeth out and they have Darkness in stead of a vision.<sup>89</sup>

Continued perception of one's assurance lay solely in the gift of grace:

There is no man who hath any Grace that is true and saving...but that the Holy Spirit by his watchfull love over it, and supplyes of it, is able to preserve it, to extricate it from Difficulties, to free it from Opposition, and to encrease it unto its full measure and perfection...And on the other side, there is none who hath received Grace in such a Measure, nor hath so confirmed it by constant uninterrupted Exercise, as that he can preserve it one moment, or Act it in any one Instance or Duty without the continual Supplyes of new Actual Grace and help from him.<sup>90</sup>

For Petto also, the only guarantee of distinguishing between a "strong flashy opinion and fancy" and a true testimony was the self-authentication of the Spirit itself.<sup>91</sup> In spite of Petto's assertion that the Spirit can only be easier to discern than salvation itself – "That which evidenceth another thing to me, must needs itself be more discernable"<sup>92</sup> – indecipherability again takes the form of solipsism.

Experience is, of course, fundamentally unstable: it exists in time, and retrospection necessarily installs a distance between it and the individual who can only 'make sense' of it at one remove. The alignment of faith with feeling<sup>93</sup> compounded anxiety, for the inability to retrieve a previous assurance might be an indication that one's faith was merely temporary. Memory was the tool through which such experience might be sustained, but it also entailed a return to interpretation which, as Petto acknowledged, might corrode, rather than preserve, feeling faith. The temporality of

<sup>86</sup> Bunyan, 'Some Gospel Truths Opened', in *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan*, ed. T.L. Underwood and Roger Sharrock, 13 vols (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1980), I, 16.

<sup>87</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, pp. 41, 43.

<sup>88</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, p. 54.

<sup>89</sup> Owen, *Pneumatologia*, p. 91.

<sup>90</sup> Owen, *Pneumatologia*, p. 344.

<sup>91</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, pp. 66-7.

<sup>92</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, p. 74.

<sup>93</sup> Experimental Calvinists, in contrast to the growing rationalism around them, were rooted in a tradition in which Tyndale had insisted that "where the Spirit is, there is feeling" and stressed the need for a "feeling faith". Tyndale, 'Parable of the Wicked Mammon' and 'Epistle to the Romans', *Doctrinal Treatises* (Cambridge: Parker Society, 1847), pp. 78, 493.



experience and its ordering through memory are of course issues that lie at the centre of all autobiographical writing. However, for those concerned to identify their spiritual status it had a particular resonance, and experimental Calvinist autobiographical writing explored a particular range of strategies for grappling with the problem which it posed.<sup>94</sup>

### Conclusion

Experimental Calvinists turned to the Bible for assurance in response to anxieties fostered by the dynamics of double predestination. However, while they championed an integration of Word and word, Spirit and Letter, their reading, like their theology, was more ‘dualist’ than ‘monist’; it bifurcated into hermeneutical and experiential models, and privileged the latter. Interpretation of Scripture fuelled existing anxieties over evidence, signification, and the Letter, while autopsies and collation bespoke an ambivalence towards the reader born of the paradox of preparation within predestination. An ideal of saving reading as an experiential union that subsumed reader and word into Spirit provided an alternative. Again, the removal of the reader’s autonomy was both liberating and disempowering, and a source of further anxiety. Furthermore, if voice (spoken or inner) was supposed to figure presence, it was also an index of disappearance. The temporality of experiential encounters with the Spirit invited a hermeneutical re-reading that did not confirm but confuse. Experimental Calvinist autobiographers found different ways of returning to the letter in order to convert their reading, and thereby themselves. The strategies of inscription that shaped diary, conversion narrative and spiritual autobiography into certificates of salvation are the concern of the following three chapters.

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<sup>94</sup> The diarist Oliver Heywood was to engage most explicitly with the nature of memory, and its relationship to grace and works – see chapter four, pp. 125-126.



## **Chapter Four**

### **'that I may tye myself under mine own handwriting': Diary and the Experimental Calvinist Anxiety of Reading Salvation**

#### **Introduction**

Calvinism instilled not only a crippling anxiety over salvation, but also a concern over how one might *know* that one was saved. That distress was produced by a theology which insisted upon absolutes yet was founded upon paradox. Such internal pressures yielded the consoling doctrine of preparation, and a progressive structure of conversion through the Ordo Salutis, but these sat uncomfortably within a framework of predestination. Likewise, the comfort of perseverance was countered by the prospect that one's faith might be merely temporary. These conflicts were intensified in the context of experimental Calvinism, in which the relationship between grace and works had been made doubly fraught by Arminian and Antinomian controversies, which produced punitive articulations of the decree of reprobation, and which, through the emergence of 'gathered' churches, placed even greater onus on the ability to discern conversion. Such pressures in turn impacted upon experimental Calvinist reading of the Bible, and frustrated claims that through it assurance could be found. The inherent contradiction of preparation within predestination expressed itself in ambivalence over the role of the reader, who was required to exercise diligence in his or her relationship with Scripture, but who was reminded that interpretative power lay with the Holy Spirit alone. As the notion of perseverance gave way to doubts over temporary faith and the misleading potential of excessive zeal, the affective motions of the Spirit through the Word were subjected to the erosion of time, and retrospective questioning of their veracity. Tensions arose between hermeneutic and experiential models of reading the Word for signs of salvation, and experimental Calvinists turned to diaries, conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies as means by which they attempted to reconcile their relationship with the Word. Experimental Calvinist diaries constitute what might be considered the first stage of that developing art of saving reading. Although use of the three forms of life-writing overlapped in terms of chronology, diary-keeping belonged to a lengthy puritan tradition, unlike the emerging conversion narratives which were fostered by the testimonies required by separatist churches, and the spiritual autobiographies which flourished in the second half of the century. Furthermore, diarists still aspired towards securing an experiential encounter with grace through performative inscription, even if they could rarely achieve that goal; conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies were increasingly to abandon an ambition that proved difficult to realise, instead re-evaluating the role of hermeneutic reading in the quest for a clear conversion. It is necessary first to trace the origins of diary-keeping in the Calvinist paradox of preparation within predestination, and to discuss the nature of a genre that resists easy definition,



before considering how the handful of experimental Calvinist diaries that are known to survive in their original holograph form negotiated passive experiential and active hermeneutic models of reading in the search for assurance.

### The Puritan Tradition of Diary-Writing and its Origins in the Doctrine of Preparation

The Puritan tradition of self-examination and diary-writing is well known. As discussed in chapter two, Baxter, Petto, Gale and Alleine were among the most widely-read writers who advocated 'self-tryal', and who suggested it might be conducted through writing.<sup>1</sup> Its roots in the doctrine of preparation are evidenced by the diary of its early advocate, Richard Rogers, who aimed to achieve "the betteringe of my life in writing this", and who expressed in it the hope that "when I cannot presently recover my self, yet that I might goe about it litle by litle".<sup>2</sup> His comments serve as a reminder that one should not be beguiled into reading Puritan diaries at face-value, for these texts are not merely *records* of assurance (or indeed, anxiety), but *processes* whereby their authors tried to write themselves into - or out of - those states. The most influential work on the benefits of diary-keeping for experimental Calvinists was Isaac Ambrose's *Media*, part of a trilogy with *Prima* and *Ultima* (he is explicitly mentioned in the diaries of Roger Lowe, John Angier, and Oliver Heywood.<sup>3</sup> In *Prima*, he addressed readers who had followed his earlier advice "to be frequent in prayer, and in hearing of the word" and who (according to Ambrose) had replied "But so we have done... and yet we feel no conversion". He advised them to write down their sins "either in this book, or on some other paper, and kneeling on thy knees, spread thy Catalogue before the Lord, I say, spread thy Catalogue before the Lord"<sup>4</sup>. In *Media* he expanded upon that theme, arguing that

Self-tryal is A Discussion of a man's life,\* that his Thoughts Words and Deeds may be seen, and censured according to the rule of God's Law.

<sup>1</sup> See chapter two, pp. 77-87; Sibbes, *Soule's Conflict*, p. 85; Baxter, *Saint's Everlasting Rest*, pp. 386, 428, and *Call to the Unconverted*, p. 274; Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, p. 43; Gale, *Anatomie of Infidelitie*, p. 233, 236; Alleine, *Alarime to Unconverted Sinners*, pp. 178-187.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Rogers, *Diary*, 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1587; 12<sup>th</sup> September 1587. Other notable early Calvinist diarists include Samuel Ward and Ralph Josselin.

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Ambrose, 'Media: The Middle Things, In reference to the First and Last Things: or, The Means, Duties, Ordinances, Both Secret, Private and Publicke, For Continuance and Increase of a Godly Life, Once Begun, till we come to Heaven', in *Prima Media and Ultima* (London: Nathaniel Webb and John Grantham, 1650). [Hereafter referred to as 'Media'.] Ambrose (1604-1663) was a Presbyterian from Lancashire, and was among those ejected for non-conformity in 1662. He forcibly reiterated the doctrines of double predestination in his works: "all live together, and all lye together, all rest together, and all rot together: but when this night is past, and the last day is sprung, then is the wofull separation; some turn on the right, and those are the blessed; others on the left hand, and those are the cursed." 'Ultima' in *Prima Media and Ultima* (London: Nathaniel Webb and William Grantham, 1650), p. 106. [Hereafter referred to as 'Ultima'.] Like other experimental Calvinists, he also espoused the necessity of regeneration, the importance of the heart, the unregenerate will to evil, and the imminent prospect of doomsday. Ambrose, 'Prima', in *Prima Media and Ultima*, p. 2, 9, 12 [Hereafter referred to as 'Prima']; 'Ultima', p. 96. For allusions to Ambrose in the diaries of John Angier and Roger Lowe, see footnotes 20 and 24 below.

<sup>4</sup> Ambrose, 'Prima', pp. 49, 59.



\*for the finding out the true state of a mans soul towards God.<sup>5</sup>

Ambrose defined 'discussion' as

A sifting of our life and dealings, by which we pull things out of the heap, where before they lay confused, and unseen, and by which we set every fact of ours in open view, that it may be scanned, and seen by itself what it is.<sup>6</sup>

The examination of one's soul was defined in visual, rather than oral terms, and inscription was a natural extension of that. He offered examples for his readers to follow in the form of a series of model diary entries,<sup>7</sup> and stressed the importance of re-reading them once a year in order to take stock of one's spiritual progress:

And once a year purposes (by Gods grace) to examine himself by it; the use and end of it is this:

1. Hereby he observes something of God to his soul, and of his soul to God. 2. Upon occasion he pours out his soul to God accordingly, and either is humbled or thankful. 3. He considers how it is with him in respect of time past, and if he have profited, in grace, to find out the means whereby he hath profited, that he may make more constant use of such means; or wherein he hath decayed, to observe by what temptation he was overcome, that his former errors may make him more wary for the future.

Besides many other uses, as of his own Experiences, and evidences, which he may (by the Lords help) gather out of this diary.<sup>8</sup>

The practice of re-reading was central to the discernment of salvation. It provided a way to resist the stark polarities of despair and assurance by enabling an interplay between narrating, narrated, and reading selves. Unlike ephemeral affective reading, it exploited temporality, harnessing retrospection as a means of preparation. Such re-reading is hard to recover, but some entries make acknowledgement of it, and occasionally deletions or amendments to the holograph leave a trail by which it can be traced.<sup>9</sup>

Ambrose had devoted chapter eleven of his *Media* to the "necessity of preparation to the Hearing of the Word", but he was aware of the apparent contradiction between his entreaties to "fall on this or that duty" (including diary-writing) and predestination. He was careful to point out that "it is not as if they could do any thing of their own strength or power, but because Jesus Christ...puts forth his

<sup>5</sup> Ambrose, 'Media', p. 56.

<sup>6</sup> Ambrose, 'Media', p. 56.

<sup>7</sup> Ambrose, 'Media', pp. 71-85.

<sup>8</sup> Ambrose, 'Media', p. 70.



own power...to enable them".<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, he could not avoid the fact that the act of keeping a diary was predicated upon a paradox essential to Calvinist casuistry. As with their efforts to read themselves into assurance, the attempts of diarists to capture grace in and through writing would always be strained.

### Towards a Definition of Experimental Calvinist Diary

Experimental Calvinist Diary, then, like the theology which occasioned it, was founded upon contradiction. Furthermore, the genre itself is fundamentally conflictive, as critics have been forced to acknowledge. Before turning to the diaries themselves, it is first necessary to air some of the issues that have bearing upon the ambition to secure assurance of salvation through private writing. Many critiques of Diary get waylaid in attempts to arrive at an adequate definition of the form.<sup>11</sup> In 'Toward Conceptualising Diary' Felicity A. Nussbaum articulates the common presumption that diaries are "works written to the moment rather than from a retrospective time and stance", and are "the daily recording of the thoughts, feelings and activities of the writer, entered frequently and regularly".<sup>12</sup> However, it will become apparent that there can be varying degrees of retrospective distance within a diary, and even within single entries, which may be subjected to later amendment. Furthermore, as Robert A. Fothergill observes in *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries*, Diary

is continually sliding away into its many kindred forms. Surrounding the diary, at various points of the compass, lie meditations, letters, anecdote collections, occasional essays, rough-drafts, chronicle-histories, commonplace books, and many more examples of more or less regular, more-or-less private writing.<sup>13</sup>

Fothergill seeks to lend coherence through the suggestion that "In general let it be agreed that a diary is what a person writes when he says 'I am writing my diary'".<sup>14</sup> In his unpublished doctoral thesis, 'Style and Convention in the Diary: An Investigation with reference to the Reader', Andrew Hassam argues, however, that in the light of work by Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, "the subject can no longer be placed at the centre of our approach to the diary". Instead he "emphasises an interaction between the reader and the text rather than the personality of the diarist", and adapts Fothergill in order to assert that "diary is what a person reads when they say, I am reading a diary".<sup>15</sup> It is clear from such debates that concepts of writing and reading are challenged by the genre. In truth, the

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Richard Rogers, *Diary*, 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1587; 20<sup>th</sup> May, 1587; 20<sup>th</sup> June, 1587.

<sup>10</sup> Ambrose, 'Media', pp. 264-269; Epistle Dedicatory, *Prima, Media & Ultima*, sig. A2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> For a survey of critiques on Diary, see the introduction, p. 21, footnote 53.

<sup>12</sup> Nussbaum, pp. 128, 130.

<sup>13</sup> Fothergill, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Fothergill, p. 3.



difficulty of arriving at an adequate definition of it is its single most defining feature, for its mode of operation is equivocal and disingenuous.

The issue of sincerity in diary-writing has troubled critics.<sup>16</sup> The difficulty of discerning God's will was central both to anxiety over salvation and to the reading of the word, and it is tempting to think – if impossible to prove – that diarists may have turned to forms that manipulated notions of intention. One might argue, with a degree of accuracy, that a diary is essentially a private document, and that its only envisaged reader is the person who wrote it, but the very possibility of such a generalising statement is grounded in the fact of frequent disclosure, accidental or otherwise. If in reading Diary we do indeed change the thing seen by the act of looking, nonetheless the prospect of discovery always shadows its dubious ontology. Diary flirts with, and withdraws from, various constructions of the reader, and in this respect one can see why it should provide a rich site for negotiating the experimental Calvinist ambivalence over reading. The ambiguous solipsism of a document that claims to do away with an external gaze echoes that of a Scripture which was supposed to be self-authenticating. However, where the latter grew out of a distrust of the corrupting potential of human agency, Diary elevates the reader-author, as it seeks different ways to effect union between interpreter and interpreted.

Accepting that Diary resists and subverts definition, nonetheless one needs to assert some working criteria by which texts are selected for inclusion in this chapter rather than in those on other forms of life-writing. While not forgetting the tradition of Puritan self-examination, it makes sense to start from the particular experimental Calvinist material available. Immediately one encounters a methodological hiatus, for very little survives. Neither can one be certain that one is fully aware of all that does, for there may yet be texts beyond the practical reach of the most thorough search, “sleeping on the shelves”.<sup>17</sup> Both these factors prohibit generalising assertions, and dictate an approach that, like Diary itself, celebrates the fragment, and defies closure: close readings of selected passages will yield more insight than attempts at categorisation or exhaustiveness. With these caveats in mind, one can say that the experimental Calvinist diaries available to us generally promote self-examination, but are also engaged in re-casting what they find; take the form of

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<sup>15</sup> Hassam, pp. 82, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Paul Delany observes that “the problem of truth or sincerity in autobiography becomes hopelessly confused when an autobiographical statement is inextricably linked to some larger and extraneous aesthetic design”. Delany, p. 2. Delany does not specifically include diaries in his address, but his statement is also relevant to texts that often subscribe to formulaic structures of Puritan self-examination. In relation to diaries in general, compare, for example, Elias Canetti's statement that “In a diary, one talks to oneself. The man who cannot do this, who sees an audience before him...is a forger”, with Roger Cardinal's recognition that “diary-writing generally tends to equivocate over the readership issue, and to make gestures which ‘allow for’ a potential audience”. Canetti, p. 44; Cardinal, p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> The fullest, and most recent bibliography of printed diaries acknowledges that, for all those listed, “there are many others sleeping on the shelves”, and is published in ring-binder form in order to allow for subsequent additions. C.S. Handley, *An Annotated Bibliography of Diaries Printed in English*, 4 vols (Aldeburgh: Hanover Press, 1997), p. 1.



multiple, fragmented entries, although they may on occasion aspire to more extended narrative;<sup>18</sup> and make claims to secrecy, yet remain aware of God's gaze, and wary of man's.<sup>19</sup> The single most unifying feature is that all the texts included in this chapter were produced, and survive, in holograph form, unmediated by editor or publication. The act of writing, and the marks on the page, are the focus of these diarists' attempts to rework their experience of reading into one compatible with salvation. The holograph status of their texts raises questions about the presence of the writer, the presence of the reader, and, entwined with these, the presence – and permanence – of assurance.

Only a handful of experimental Calvinist diaries are currently known of, and even fewer survive in holograph.<sup>20</sup> Those that do were written by Owen Stockton, Oliver Heywood, Eleanor Stockton, Isaac Archer, and Roger Lowe.<sup>21</sup> All were produced after the Restoration, and some spill beyond

<sup>18</sup>See, for example, Isaac Archer's diary, which begins with a retrospective narrative of his life to date, or Heywood's papers, which frequently tip over into more extended autobiographical structures. Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL Additional MS 8499, pp. 1-42 [the pagination is Archer's own]; Heywood, 'Experiments with Reflections', *Papers*, vol. 7, BL, Additional MS 45,969. Works which are exclusively extended narrative written in retrospect, are not included here, even though they have sometimes been referred to as diaries – for example that written by Adam Martindale. Felicity A. Nussbaum notes that even 'regular' diary-writing "delivers narrative and frustrates it; it simultaneously displays and withholds". Her related arguments that "nonfictional serial narrative forms... allow contradictions to coexist without assimilating the dissonance" and that "diary may be an important... site of contest between the ideologies of the unitary self and the more discontinuous subject" [Nussbaum, pp. 137, 130, 132] have obvious pertinence to the experimental Calvinist torn between elect and reprobate self-identities. As will be seen, the diary is no less a site of attempted assimilation than more public and extended narrative forms of autobiography.

<sup>19</sup> Isaac Ambrose notes that the sanctified person "considers God as an eye-witness of all his thoughts and words, and doings, and dealings". Ambrose, 'Media', p.13.

<sup>20</sup> Some manuscripts have gone missing; others, listed as diaries in the catalogues, on inspection do not qualify as such for the purposes of this chapter (a hazard of the problem of definition discussed earlier). A nineteenth-century copy of John Angier's diary, by Rev. Canon Raines, is held in Chetham Library, Manchester. The diary spanned the period July 1662 – August 12, 1676. Raines notes that "It was formerly in the possession of Mr Harrison of Bankfield in the Flyde and lent to me by Rev. W. Thornber of Blackpool, June, 1863." Rev. Canon Raines, *Lancashire MSS*, vol. 23, p.433. The original manuscript is now missing. Extracts from John Angier's diary were edited by Oliver Heywood, and by Ernest Axon in *Chetham Society*, New Series, 97, (1937), 123-132 (Axon used Heywood and Raines as his sources). Angier was also aware of Ambrose, and probably familiar with his 'Media'; an entry on January 23<sup>rd</sup> 1663/4 remarks on his sudden death. *Chetham Society*, New Series, 97, p. 111. The manuscript described as a Philip Henry's "diary and cashbook" in Dr Williams's Library (DWL 90/1, 91/10), is essentially a cashbook. Henry Newcome's diary, for September 1661-September 1663, was published in *Chetham Society*, First Series, vol. XIX (1849). Its source is an abstract copied out by Henry Newcome's son. *Chetham Society*, First Series, 26-27 (1849, 1852), XIX, iii. The manuscript listed in the British Library Catalogue under Henry Newcome (shelfmark 25, 463, f.170) is a transcript made after 1849.

<sup>21</sup> Oliver Heywood's papers are held in the British Library, Additional. MSS 45,963 - 45,981. They were edited by J. Horsfall Turner and published as *The Rev. Oliver Heywood, B.A., 1630-1702, His Autobiography, Diaries, Anecdote and Event Books* (Brighouse: Printed for the Editor, 1882-1885). Owen Stockton's diary is held in Dr Williams's Library, London, MS 24.7, as is Eleanor Stockton's, MS 24.8: neither have been published. Isaac Archer's diary is held at the University Library, Cambridge, Additional. MSS 8499; it was published as *Two East Anglian Diaries: Isaac Archer and William Coe 1641-1729*, ed. by Matthew Storey, *Suffolk Records Society* vol. 36, gen. ed. David Dymond (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994). Roger Lowe's diary is held in the public library, Hindley, Lancashire, Local History Collection [no shelfmark]. It was first published as *The Diary of Roger Lowe*, ed. by William L. Sachse (London, New York and Toronto: Longmans, Green & Co, 1938), and more recently as *The Diary of Roger Lowe*, ed. by Ian Winstanley (Wigan: Picks Publishing, 1994).

A number of sources have been used in identifying extant manuscripts for this chapter. There are three main bibliographies of printed diaries: William Matthews, *British Diaries: An Annotated Bibliography of British Diaries written between 1442 and 1942* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press; London: Cambridge University Press, 1950); Patricia Pate Havlice, *And So to Bed: A Bibliography of Diaries Published in English* (Metuchen, New Jersey, and London: Scarecrow Press, Inc, 1987); C.S. Handley, *An Annotated Bibliography of Diaries printed in English*, 4 vols (Aldeburgh, Hanover Press, 1997). Online bibliographic sources have included MLA Bibliography and Dissertation Abstracts International. Searches have also been conducted on holdings at the British Library, Dr. Williams's Library, and at the



1689 (the year of the Toleration Act and the necessary, if inevitably somewhat arbitrary, boundary to this study). More significantly, all were written by Presbyterians. While the paucity of extant material means that one should be cautious in drawing too firm a conclusion from this fact, the lack of Independent diaries<sup>22</sup> suggests that members of gathered churches many have had less need of secret writing because they had the public opportunity of oral testimonies through which to structure their conversions. Certainly Presbyterians, lacking such formal opportunities through which to negotiate their reading of salvation, favoured the time-honoured Puritan tradition of diary-writing.

The importance of access to the original holograph cannot be over-stressed. All copies, including published versions, are subject to an editorial process. Earlier editors tend to be more interventionist, but even recent editions modernise punctuation, and are occasionally forced into conjecture, particularly when faced with the task of deciphering difficult handwriting.<sup>23</sup> More importantly, there is no substitute for the actual marks on the page. Close attention needs to be paid to such graphic details as deletion, corrections, revisions, changes of ink, and layout (including marginalia, size and tidiness of writing) in order to retrieve as much information as possible about the process of composition. Furthermore, some diarists invested performative power in the hand-written mark as a strategy for securing assurance, and it is therefore appropriate that this study should engage with the texts in their intended manifestation.

Four of these experimental Calvinist diarists placed their relationship with the Word at the centre of their enterprise; Roger Lowe, however, was preoccupied with secular concerns, and for that reason remains marginal to the discussion that follows.<sup>24</sup> Owen Stockton and Oliver Heywood were more

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National Register of Archives. Chetham's Library in Manchester provided information on John Angier (a copy of his diary is held there).

<sup>22</sup> Vavasour Powell appears to be the only Independent to have left some trace of a diary; the editor of his autobiography notes that the writings between pp. 56-92 are "taken out of his Dyary of Journal (it being his custome to keep a dayly observation and Record of every remarkable Providence occurring to him, and of the frame of his Heart, in his spiritual getings [sic] and losings every day". Powell, *The Life and Death of Vavasor Powell* ([London? n. pub.], 1671), p. 56.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Storey's edition of Isaac Archer's diary, published in 1994. Storey, *Two East Anglian Diaries*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>24</sup> Apprentice to a South Lancashire Mercer, Roger Lowe sheds considerable light upon lay experience of experimental Calvinism through his diary (the other four diarists are either ministers, or married to one.) He frequently got into arguments over the merits of Presbyterianism versus Episcopacy (but usually managed to patch them up afterwards). [Lowe, *Diary*, February 1664, 25. Thursday; July 1664, 29; August 1665, 23; December 1665, 27.] Impoverished in this life, he held out hope for reward in the next, noting that "God's providence is the poor man's inheritance" [Lowe, *Diary*, February 1664]; his diary makes clear the appeal of divine Election to those disadvantaged in this world. [Lowe, *Diary*, March 1663, 1; April 1663, 16; September 1663, 22; March 1664, 6. Lowe mentioned having read "Ambrose's book" (he copies out some psalms from it), and also Lewis Bayly's *The Practice of Pietie*, [Lowe, *Diary*, May 1666, 14; December 1666, 21] but he did not really engage in extended self-examination. Most of the time Lowe used his diary to record romantic exploits, drinking and general japery (most notably, an occasion when "John Potter and wife and John Hasleden invented to efright me in tellinge me I was cited to Bishop's Court for Nonconfformitie to Common Prayer") [Lowe, *Diary*, April 1664, 17]. Other than a single reference to "repeating a sermon", or the copying out or singing of psalms, [Lowe, *Diary*, February 1665, 5; May 14, 1666] he did not mention or respond to his experience of the Word, neither did he express particular anxiety over his salvation. For these reasons, his diary must remain marginal to the discussion that follows.



confident and authoritative in upholding the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of saving reading through writing; Eleanor Stockton and Isaac Archer found it harder to resolve their anxiety, and lost faith in the ability of human agency to harness assurance through inscription. Owen Stockton's diary is relatively unsophisticated in recording the assurance he found through Scripture, but derives strength from an approach which simply edits out anxiety. Heywood goes further in engaging with the difficulties inherent in the experiential model of reading Salvation. Furthermore, he exploits the textuality of his work in that process, exploring ways of capturing both the presence, and the permanence of assurance through inscription. While Heywood's ambition cannot be fully realised, nonetheless, he, and Owen Stockton, manage to give the appearance of relative success in using their diaries to write themselves into saving reading.

By contrast, Eleanor Stockton and Isaac Archer could not conceal the severe difficulties they encountered in negotiating their reading through their diaries, and their texts reveal a loss of confidence in the power of inscription to secure a sense of salvation. Where Heywood invoked a performative notion of inscription that both enacted, and stabilised, assurance, Eleanor Stockton's attempts in a similar vein gave way to unresolved accounts of mis-reading, in which an experiential relationship with the Word proved unreliable. Eschewing performative notions of inscription, Eleanor begins to use longer narrative sections in which she attempts to apply a hermeneutic re-reading of experience. Isaac Archer's diary provides the most explicit, extended account of anxiety over the relationship between experiential and formal reading, an anxiety which is welded to its social context of controversy over the Book of Common Prayer. Again, like Eleanor Stockton's diary, the performative aspirations of his text end in failure, this time in a manner that calls into question the very ontology of his diary. Thus, while Owen Stockton and Heywood can be said to have met with some limited success, together these diarists failed to develop a consistent art of reading salvation that fully reconciled experimental Calvinist anxieties; the difficulties they encountered were to be further addressed through conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies.

#### Upholding the Experimental Calvinist Orthodoxy of Saving Reading: The Diaries of Owen Stockton and Oliver Heywood

Of the four diarists mentioned above, Owen Stockton least admitted to anxieties spawned by the difficulty of discerning salvation; instead he used his diary to reiterate a positive relationship with the Word, and thereby suppress despair. Stockton (1630-1680) was educated at Christ's College, Cambridge, under the Platonist Henry More, and was ordained in February 1655. From 1657 until the Act of Uniformity he was the town lecturer at Colchester. In 1662 he set up a dissenting



congregation there, and after St. Bartholomew's day in 1665 he moved to Chatham in Suffolk. He continued to revisit Colchester and other places in Essex; he was often in danger of arrest, although on more than one occasion he was forewarned by the constable, who was one of his hearers. In 1669 Stockton was reported as having a conventicle in Colchester; in 1672 he took out licences to be an Independent lecturer at Ipswich, Colchester and Hadleigh. He spent the rest of his life living in Ipswich and preaching alternately there and at Colchester.<sup>25</sup>

Owen Stockton's diary (which he titled 'Observations and Experiences of gods dealings w<sup>th</sup> my soul and other memorable passages of his providences') was begun on April 1<sup>st</sup> 1665, and breaks off, mid-sentence, on August 20<sup>th</sup> 1680, presumably through ill-health (he died of a fever some days later). It is written in a small - sometimes minute - spidery hand, with frequent, and sometimes emphatic, deletions. The book has clearly had a chequered history since it belonged to Stockton. It was subsequently used, back to front, by Isaiah Toms of Hadleigh for the copying out of hymns.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, pages 14 and 15 have been torn out, and other pages have been partially removed. The latter mutilations, at least, were not an act of self-censorship by Owen, but were carried out at a later date, for they cut through the middle of a line of Toms' handwriting. The dense nature of the text, and its author's frequent use of abbreviations, mean that it is often difficult to read and occasionally illegible altogether. Altogether, the appearance of the holograph is an intense and hermetic registration of self-scrutiny.

From the diary it is clear that Owen Stockton subscribed to double predestination, upheld the power of grace over works, and negotiated his faith through an affective relationship with the Word. He was more anxious about the spiritual fate of his daughter than about his own. On her death he returned again and again to the question of her salvation. He repeatedly wrote down scriptures that gave him reassurance, observing that "your covenant is to give all things necessary to salvation 2.Sam. 23.5", and recording that "god gave me other encouragements to hope to him in reference to my child from ye Scriptures Suffer little children to come unto me Mark 19.14." Owen presents an unfailingly positive account of his relationship with Scripture, remarking that through it "I was slowly encouraged to hope for its salvation". However, there is something defensive in his need to reiterate the point so frequently, and it suggests that the writing down, and possibly, the re-reading of such scriptures, played a key part in buttressing his faith.<sup>27</sup>

If Owen Stockton used his diary to write himself into a better frame, nonetheless he strongly maintained the traditional Calvinist position on the human will, citing "it is not of him who willeth

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<sup>25</sup> *DNB*, XVIII, 1280 - 1281.

<sup>26</sup> This fact is recorded in a note inside the front cover by his son, Samuel Toms.



or runneth but of God [who] sheweth mercy Exod 35.19 Rom 9.14,5.”<sup>28</sup> Reflecting a proper sense of God’s omnipotence, Stockton’s accounts of his personal relationship with Scripture were most often figured in terms of visitation. For example, on April 16<sup>th</sup> 1665, he noted that “In ye morning I awaked w<sup>th</sup> gd Scriptures in my thoughts”.<sup>29</sup> In his public capacity, however, he was more proactive, guiding and governing the way his family and congregation read. He frequently referred to leading the “family exercise” and he made plans to “frame a Scripture catechism”.<sup>30</sup> His public duties sometimes conflicted with his private ones: on 21<sup>st</sup> October 1666 he noted that “through multiplicity of other occasions I omitted ye recording of my experiences for a bout [sic] a quarter of a year.”<sup>31</sup> One senses that Owen Stockton might have been more readily distracted from his task of preparation than Heywood, for his diary lacks the latter’s enthusiasm or inventiveness. His text serves as a record and reminder of assurance, rather than as a performative enactment of it, and his attitude towards writing is altogether more guarded than Heywood’s; he worries over whether it is proper to write on the Sabbath, concluding that it is “lawful” after hearing a voice saying “thou must write in a book”.<sup>32</sup> Stockton could not endorse the human agency implicit in preparation. Nonetheless, there was some tacit recognition that through a diary one might write oneself into faith. An entry for April 9<sup>th</sup> 1665, for example, contained the observation that “I was much ~~unhin~~ discomposed in my soul in ye morning”.<sup>33</sup> Stockton replaced what would probably have been the word “unhinged” with the word “discomposed”, a decision that has interesting resonance. It alluded to what Perkins called the “beginnings of composition”, (or rather, to the lack of them), the first signs of conversion.<sup>34</sup> It also suggested the textual process of composition at work in the diary (he used the term “composing” in relation to writing in a later entry<sup>35</sup>). For Owen Stockton, spiritual composition was the absence of anxiety, and his writing was a reflection of that, reiterating right reading in order to erect a barricade against the inadmissible.

Like Owen Stockton, Oliver Heywood was concerned to write himself into saving reading, but he engaged more deeply with the anxieties implicit in experimental Calvinist attempts to read salvation. He was also less perturbed by the human agency implied by the work of preparation, and readier to manipulate textuality as a means for redressing the ephemeral nature of assurance. Heywood (1630-1702) produced a wide range of personal papers throughout his life (his last diary entry was made five days before his death). Like Stockton, Heywood was a Presbyterian Minister, and their

<sup>27</sup> Owen Stockton, *Diary*, pp. 5,6. [The pagination is Stockton’s own.]

<sup>28</sup> Owen Stockton, *Diary*, p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> Owen Stockton, *Diary*, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Owen Stockton, *Diary*, pp. 49; 73.

<sup>31</sup> Owen Stockton, *Diary*, p. 69.

<sup>32</sup> Owen Stockton, *Diary*, p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Owen Stockton, *Diary*, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> Perkins, *Workes*, I, 638-641, 2, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Owen Stockton, *Diary*, p. 81.



ordination conferred upon both of them a special and authoritative relationship with the Word that is reflected in their diaries. Ordained in 1652, Heywood was ejected by the Act of Uniformity ten years later. His career suffered from swings in punitive legislation, and included a period of imprisonment,<sup>36</sup> but became more settled once his meeting-house at Northowram was finally licensed under the Toleration Act in 1689. He was in close communication with Congregationalists, and was influential in introducing to Yorkshire the ‘London Agreement’ between Presbyterians and Congregationalists in 1691.<sup>37</sup> However, this brief outline should not obscure the fact that his non-conformity was something that, for Heywood, had to be worked out day by day. For example, an entry notes that when licences to preach were revoked in 1672, he favoured compliance in order to convince the state of his party’s peaceable intentions. He clearly sought advice and support in arriving at that decision, and felt the need to justify it in writing (possibly with future readers in mind): “My people most of them (especially the most intelligent) advised to it, and judged it the most prudent course that could be taken to withdraw into more retired meetings and not be so publick”.<sup>38</sup> A poem in Heywood’s diary<sup>39</sup> dramatises the conflicting allegiances with which men such as Heywood grappled. It opposes human legislation and divine justice, and the strain endured in attempting to negotiate a workable relationship between them is apparent in the narrator’s opening comment that “I am a riddle to myself, I find | too party’s, combating within my mind.” That fracture is reinforced by the textual device of laying the poem across two folios, verso and recto, the verso side or ‘party’ challenging the recto into self-defence. Whether or not the poem was written by Heywood himself, clearly the conflict of conscience it enacts had resonance for him.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Heywood mentions that he was imprisoned in York castle from January 28<sup>th</sup> 1684 until December 19<sup>th</sup> 1684 for preaching. Heywood *Papers*, vol. VI, BL, Additional MS 45,968, fol. 10<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> *DNB*, IX, 786-787.

<sup>38</sup> Heywood, *Papers*, vol. XIX, BL, Additional MS 45,981, fols 110<sup>r</sup>, 110<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> Heywood, *Papers*, vol. III, BL Additional MS 45,965, fol. 69v, 70r. The poem may have been copied out by Heywood from another source – elsewhere in the same volume of his diary, for example, he copies out poems by George Herbert. Heywood, *Papers*, vol. III, BL, Additional MS 45,965, fols 72<sup>v</sup> – 77<sup>r</sup>. However, searches on *English Poetry* [on CD ROM], in *Columbia Grangers Index to Poetry*, ed. by Edith P. Hazen, 10<sup>th</sup> edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994) and in *Columbia Grangers Index to Poetry in Anthologies*, ed. Nicholas Frankovich, 11<sup>th</sup> edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), have not yielded a source for this poem; it is possible that Heywood composed it himself.

<sup>40</sup> The full text of the poem is as follows [biblical citations – sometimes inconsistent – are given in the form in which Heywood presents them, and uncertain words are indicated by square brackets and question marks]:

[verso]			[recto]
	Selfe	- - -	- - - Reflection
I am a riddle to myself, I find			too party’s, combating within my mind: Rom 7.23
My left hand saith that justice is unjust			My right hand saith it may be and it must: eccles 16
My left hand saith why should a word ly?			My right hand saith my word is on high: job 16
Why was not [Argent?] stained with sable oaths			Darknes fears light and yt [sic] light darknes loaths. Job [20?]
I would go [pouring?] upon injurys			I should cast out the beams fro [sic] mine own eyes [luk 6.45?]
Why was I taken on a Sabbath day ?			It was sabbath work man to thy charge did lay luk. 4.16
Why was I taken on that Sabbath day?			Satan knows not [illeg.] & meant to say 1 ths 2.18
Why was I taken coming forth from the church ?			[Souls ?] of the air were lying at the lurch mark. 44
Why might not the second sermon heare?			that I might pity those that have none near Heb. 4.15
Why did the roaring bull rant it so high?			to make the jaile a good delivery 2. pet.28
You look on [you?] to preach that’s an offence			with dispensation Paul could not dispense 1 cor 9 10
You sufferest others in your house to hear			Christ suffered more for such, and souls are dear act 20
Why walkt you not with those yt [sic] are more wise			because I saw not with my betters eyes phi 3. 15 16



If the outward practice of Heywood's religion was sometimes circumscribed by the law, his experimental Calvinist beliefs were undiminished. In an extended autobiographical narrative entitled "Self-reflection", he expressed his firm adherence to double predestination:

I doe verily beleeeve, that I as well as others mens soules must go into an unchangeable state of joy, or misery, comfort or torment in heaven or hell...the soul shall return to god who gave it, to receive from him a sentence of absolution or condemnation.<sup>41</sup>

Among the books Heywood listed as being in his possession were "Wilkin's Eccles[iastes]", "Cotton's Concordance", "Austin de Civitate Dei", "Mr Gale's Court of the Gentiles", "Mr Joseph Alleines Life", and "Mr Perkins 2<sup>nd</sup> Volume", as well as works by Baxter and Owen, and a copy of Ambrose's *Media*; reading matter one would expect to find on the shelves of an experimental Calvinist.<sup>42</sup> Like Owen and others, he stressed the mediating role of Christ, and insisted that salvation was by free grace alone.<sup>43</sup> As the author of *Heart-Treasure* and *Youth's Monitor* (among many other works), Heywood was both custodian and disseminator of experimental Calvinist values, and he occupied that position with confidence. That was also true of his preaching: he was not afraid to remind his congregation of the possibility that their faith might be temporary, their zeal mere hypocrisy. In a sermon delivered in Pontefract in 1692/3, he warned against "meer morality", "hypocritical pretences", "An intermitting zeal in religion", and "A temporary profession of Christianity".<sup>44</sup>

Along with his adherence to a punitive theology of double predestination, Heywood championed the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of saving reading discussed in the previous chapter: he privileged experience above reasoned enquiry, and identified it chiefly with oral, rather than written, manifestation's of the Word. Placing particular emphasis on the importance of cultivating the *affective* workings of grace, Heywood devoted a work titled *Heart-Treasure* to the subject (in his

Why kept you not within the limitation  
Why were you not to plead your own cause [free?  
Why would you not part with a little clay  
Was it not for a charitable use  
Why made you not a promise to forbear  
Why is your prison strictor than before  
What will you do in case of transportation

<sup>41</sup> Heywood, *Papers*, vol. VI, BL, Add. MS 45,968, fol. 5. The 'Self-reflections' form an extended narrative written from the back of the book (the front is taken up with his diary). The pagination is his own, suggesting he saw it as a more formal text, and possibly as a draft for publication.

<sup>42</sup> Heywood, *Papers*, vol. III, BL, Additional MS 45,965, fols 111<sup>r</sup> – 114<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>43</sup> Heywood, *Papers*, vol. XIX, BL, Additional MS 45,981, fols 107<sup>v</sup>, 108<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> Heywood, *Papers*, vol. IX, BL, Additional MS 45,971, fols 7<sup>v</sup>– 9<sup>r</sup>.

inclosures suit not with common [attention?] jud 3  
my meaning was my cause should plead for me [gen 30 33 ?]  
because I durst not give my cause away [job 27 6]  
faith knows not charity for an excuse 1 cor 33  
a promise not a prison I did fear [Rob 2 10]  
because the judg [sic] is nearer to the door jam 58  
[illeg.] that to him that [illeg.] in [illeg.] nation [1 cor 10 13?]



diary he recorded with satisfaction a list of names to whom he had distributed it.)<sup>45</sup> He also drafted a work called *Youth's Monitor*, in which he advised daily reading of scripture passages "not for notion or disputation, but for motion of affections", and recommended that his readers "frequently attend a plain and awakening ministry".<sup>46</sup> Like others, he made it clear that a proper relationship with Scripture was not confined to the page: "We are not allways [sic] reading the word, but must be always thinking of it, and meditating of it, day and night".<sup>47</sup> Heywood, in line with the Augustinian position discussed in the previous chapter,<sup>48</sup> not only privileged the spoken word above the written, but placed the "interior voice" of the mind above that. Fascinated by Augustine's comments on memory, he discussed the issue at length in *Youth's Monitor*.<sup>49</sup> He argued that memory was bound up with presence, and "spiritual memory", with the presence of God. He considered the word 'Remember' to signify "a representing of things absent, as if they were present", and used the example of the psalmist to illustrate his concept of "sanctified memory"<sup>50</sup>:

God was much withdrawn from David's soul, but yet he could think of an absent god... [He] remembered God and was troubled: this remembering is believing meditation.<sup>51</sup>

Memory could mediate between the soul and an absent God in times of despair; it could also convert absence into potential: "Another signification of the word, Remember, is a foresight of and preparation for something future". The exercise of sanctified memory could bring a distant God closer; it is clear how the business of recording and re-reading one's spiritual shifts should assist in the "practical improving" of that ability. However, once again, the conflict between preparation and grace rose to the surface. Heywood insisted that "heart-memory is the best memory", and that, as in affective reading of the word, the only source of true feeling was Christ: "Get savingly related to god, interested in Christ, Relation is the root of Remembrance". It becomes ambivalent whether memory is a means by which to access a relationship with God, or whether a relationship with God is a prerequisite of sanctified remembrance. Memory can be enabling, but it is also an unreliable, "strange faculty". Heywood advises that "nothing fortifys the unstable memory so much as grace", but in so doing reminds his readers once more of their own impotence.<sup>52</sup> Heywood wrote his diary partly in order to shore up the 'unstable' memory, and its uncertain yet imperative relationship with

<sup>45</sup> Heywood, *Heywood Papers*, vol. III, BL, Additional MS 45,965, fols 115<sup>v</sup>- 116<sup>r</sup>. *Heart Treasure* was published in 1667; a second part was added in 1672. *Heart Treasure* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1667).

<sup>46</sup> Heywood, *Youth's Monitor, Papers* vol. VIII, BL, Additional MS 45,970, fol. 8<sup>r</sup>. The opening epistle to the work is dated 28<sup>th</sup> August, 1689.

<sup>47</sup> Heywood, *Youth's Monitor, Papers* vol. VIII, BL, Additional MS 45,970, fol. 23<sup>v</sup>..

<sup>48</sup> See chapter three, p. 108.

<sup>49</sup> Heywood, *Youth's Monitor, Papers* vol. VIII, BL, Additional MS 45,970, fols 19<sup>v</sup> – 36<sup>r</sup>. See Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. by William Watts (London: Abel Roper, 1650), pp. 311-331.

<sup>50</sup> Heywood, *Youth's Monitor, Papers* vol. VIII, BL, Additional MS 45,970, fols 33<sup>v</sup>, 23<sup>r</sup>, 24<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>51</sup> Heywood, *Youth's Monitor, Papers* vol. VIII, BL, Additional MS 45,970, fol. 23<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> Heywood, *Youth's Monitor, Papers* vol. VIII, BL Additional MS 45,970, fols 26<sup>r</sup>, 33<sup>r</sup>, 35<sup>r</sup>, 36<sup>r</sup>, 34<sup>v</sup>, 36<sup>r</sup>.



grace. A 're-presentation' of his experience of the Word was implicit in that cause: like other diarists, and in accordance with Ambrose's recommendations, he made use of writing as an aide-memoir to the presence of grace, marking out pages for "Scriptures that in reading I found my heart sensibly warmed, inlarge, quickened by, or comfort from."<sup>53</sup> Re-reading such a catalogue would remind one of past assurance, and perhaps even rekindle it. (Elsewhere in his diary Heywood proves an inveterate list-maker<sup>54</sup>, evincing a very practical awareness of writing as a tool for identification and preservation.) However, the textual strategies by which he sought to capture both the presence and the permanence of assurance could also be more sophisticated; most noteworthy are the signed covenants that reach after a more radical, performative notion of inscription in the attempt to secure and stabilise an affective experience of grace.

Heywood was to write a treatise on the practice of "personal covenanting",<sup>55</sup> of which the following entry from the third volume of his diary is an example: <sup>56</sup>

July 31 1671

Having the opportunity of solitariness, all my family being from home, having set my self solely to the work of god and my own soule, first reading the 139 psalm concerning God's omniscience and omnipresence, with traces in mine eyes, commenting upon it, applying it to my self, accordingly setting myself in the presence of God, desiring to deale truly and faithfully with my own soul in self-examination, to rip open all sins I know of, I fell down upon my knees, and for about an hour, the Lord helped me to lay open my self before him...the Lord hath given me some secret hints of pardon, and acceptance, and did communicate himself sweetly to my heart: now these things being considered I am much pressed in Spirit to renew my covenant in writing with my God, as I have been doing it upon my knees...none is privy to these things but God and mine own conscience, and this rathre I doe this [sic] because I have found my heart slippery and inconstante that I may tye myself under mine own hand-writing, taking my warrant from Isai. 14. 5.<sup>57</sup>

The important question is why Heywood felt compelled to "renew" his Covenant, to translate it from inner voice to external letter. He found his heart "slippery and inconstant", and sought to fix it

<sup>53</sup> Ambrose, 'Media', pp. 377-380. Ambrose also privileged the oral presence as the proper approach to Scripture: "when we take in hand... the Book of Scriptures, we cannot otherwise conceive of ourselves then as standing in God's presence, to hear what he will say unto us". Ambrose, *Compleat Works*, (London: Rowland Reynolds, 1674) p. 307. Heywood, *Papers*, vol. 11, BL, Additional MS 45,973, fol. 13. The grammatical inconsistency is Heywood's.

<sup>54</sup> For example, Heywood lists his books, and reasons to fear the imminent demise of the nation. Heywood, *Papers*, vol. III, BL, Additional MS 45,965, fols 111<sup>r</sup> – 114<sup>v</sup>; fol. 63<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> Heywood was later to write a "treatise of personal covenanting". He mentions that he has been busy writing it in an entry of 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1684 – some thirteen years after this particular covenant. Heywood, *Papers*, vol. VI, BL, Additional MS 45,968, fol. 7<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> Other covenants survive from July 16<sup>th</sup> 1672 and September 23<sup>rd</sup> 1673. While there are some variations, they are essentially similar in form, and all are signed. Heywood, *Papers* vol. IV, BL, Additional MS 45,966, fols 4<sup>r</sup>-6<sup>r</sup>; 8<sup>r</sup>-9<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>57</sup> Heywood, *Papers*, vol. III, BL, Additional MS 45,965, fol. 107<sup>r</sup>. Isaiah chapter 14 verse 5 reads: "The Lord hath broken the rod of the wicked, and the scepter of the rulers". It seems more likely that the reference is to Isaiah *chapter 5 verse 14*, which speaks of the hellfire due to the complacent: "Therefore hell hath enlarged it selfe, and hath opened his mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pompe, and he that rejoyceth among them, shall descend into it".



through his handwriting, the ink “pressed” from his spirit like juice from a grape. The letters on the page are marks of spiritual presence, and nowhere more so than in the signature with which he closed the covenant:

this is the day of my solemne plighting my troth thee, the day of my soules  
espousals unto God...hoping for, and longing to injoy the compleat solemization of  
this marriage in the kingdom of heaven...This doe I make bold, O my god, to  
subscribe my self

thy devoted servant for ever  
Oliver Heywood

This instant july 3 1671:  
In my study at Coley-hall.<sup>58</sup>

The signature works performatively, unique to person and in time – the importance Heywood attached to the live moment is evident in the closing “*This instant*”. However, the signature also preserves, and allows re-visiting of that point in time. Derrida analyses its dual property in his article ‘Signature Event Context’:

By definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be claimed, the signature also marks and retains his having-been present in a past now or present [*maintenant*], thus in a general *maintenant*, in the transcendental form of presentness [*maintenance*]... But the condition of possibility of those effects is simultaneously...the condition of their impossibility, of the impossibility of their rigorous purity. In order to function, that is, to be readable, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to be detached from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, by corrupting its identity and its singularity, divides its seal [*sceau*].<sup>59</sup>

Heywood, reared on paradox, exploits both functions of the signature (similar arguments might be applied to handwriting, and to the project of Diary in general, although qualified by the fact that the link between mark, self and spiritual status is less immediate.) His written covenant serves as both a reminder and as ongoing evidence of past assurance of God’s “pardon and acceptance”. As a manifestation of “a transcendental form of presentness” it throws a line between past and future (sanctified memory, as Heywood argued, is also preparation for future salvation, and both means and result of a ‘relation’ with God). Calvinist anxiety hinged on uncertainty over how God’s covenant applied to oneself. Heywood’s practice of personal covenanting actively intervened in that dilemma, emphasising the individual’s role in the deal and cementing it through inscription that marked the

<sup>58</sup> Heywood *Papers*, vol. III, BL, Additional MS 45,965, fol. 108<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>59</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, trans. by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman, in *Limited Inc.* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988) (1-23), p. 20. [First published in *Glyph* 1, 1977.]



'live' presence of grace yet had the binding potency of legal writ. The preoccupation with God's unascertainable covenant shifted to a more manageable concern with a human pledge, a promise that was visible and embedded in the written word.

However, Heywood's attempt to stabilise assurance, while relatively successful, was not entirely resolved, for the re-reading of his covenant was not enough to revive and sustain the presence of assurance. He needed to reenact its writing, yet that repetition diminished its potency still further. A later covenant, of July 16<sup>th</sup> 1672, was less certain of God's acceptance:

Acknowledging thy justice if thou condemne me, adoring thy free-grace if thou entertain me. and who knows but God will accept

Oliver Heywood

Begun feb 1

} 1672/3<sup>60</sup>

Ended feb 3

The act of inscription was now fractured: it no longer possessed the 'present-ness' of an "instant", but suffered interruption. The shadow of temporality lingered: despite Heywood's attempts at preparation and preservation, he had to acknowledge that only God could "crown these ingagements with strength of performance and perseverance to the end."<sup>61</sup>

Owen Stockton and Oliver Heywood both sought to write themselves into saving reading through their diaries, and were relatively successful in so doing. Stockton used his text to suppress anxiety through the reiteration of Word-given assurance; Heywood was more ambitious in his manipulation of inscription in an attempt to redress the temporality of assurance, exploiting the performative holographic properties of his text. However, while these diaries give the appearance of confidence, they remain founded upon the contradiction of preparation within predestination. Seeking to uphold the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of passive experiential saving reading, they are unable to acknowledge or engage with the tensions implicit in their enterprise, or with the role played by human agency in negotiating experience, but one can glimpse an unspoken unease both in Stockton's carefully limited textual aspiration, and in Heywood's compulsive text-making. By contrast, Eleanor Stockton and Isaac Archer are less able to conceal the strained relationship between experiential and hermeneutic reading in their interaction with the Word, and their texts founder in the attempt to write themselves into saving reading.

<sup>60</sup> Heywood, *Papers*, vol. IV, BL, Additional MS 45,966, fol. 6<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>61</sup> Heywood, *Papers*, vol. III, BL, Additional MS 45,965, fol. 108<sup>v</sup>.



The Experimental Calvinist Anxiety of Saving Reading: The Diaries of Eleanor Stockton and Isaac Archer

Eleanor Stockton and Archer, like Owen Stockton and Heywood, also subscribed to the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of reading which privileged a passive experience of the Word above its interpretation, but they encountered greater difficulties in the struggle to adhere to it. Eleanor Stockton's background and life are hard to trace other than through her diary, for her gender means that her life eludes the kind of documentation afforded to her husband.<sup>62</sup> However, her lay status also means that her text is less circumscribed than his by the pressures of public reputation, ever wary of disclosure. The holograph that survives her is of few pages, stitched but unbound, and written in a large, clear hand. There is a rusty pin stuck through the final leaf for safe-keeping. It may well have been placed there by someone else, but nonetheless it is a powerful emblem of the domestic sphere Eleanor inhabited. The entries are undated, with the sole exception of one near the end of her diary: an account of a storm dated June 20<sup>th</sup> 1695. However, it is likely that the previous entries may date from some time earlier; being relatively few and intermittent in nature, it seems she wrote infrequently, and the last are markedly different in tone and content, and are written in a shakier hand. For those reasons, and because of her connection to Owen Stockton, it is appropriate, both chronologically and theologically, that her text should be considered along with other experimental Calvinist diaries of the period.

If it is wrong to use Owen Stockton's diary as a cipher for Eleanor's beliefs, nonetheless her marriage to him suggests that she shared his Presbyterian views, and her holograph bears that out. In it Eleanor copies out short passages from books of practical piety on perseverance and on the importance of "God's will not ours", under a section headed "Short sentences that I have met with in reading to satisfie & quiet under feares of falling from Grace"<sup>63</sup>. She also records that when she was young she "entered into a covenant under Mr Jeshcots Ministry", and that "many years after... I was moved from and by myselfe alone to confes acknowledg and ingage as followeth"; she then writes out in a large, neat hand a formal covenant of her faith similar to that produced by Heywood.<sup>64</sup> Like him, she sought to reify an uncertain divine covenant through a written one of her own.

<sup>62</sup> The *Dictionary of National Biography*, for example, mentions her only in passing at the end of the entry on Owen Stockton, noting only the existence of her diary and that she was the daughter of Roger Rant of Swaffham Priors, Cambridgeshire. *DNB*, XVIII, 1281.

<sup>63</sup> Eleanor Stockton, *Diary*, fol. 22<sup>r</sup>. [The text has been subsequently foliated in pencil.] The texts from which Eleanor copies out passages include Henry Scudder, *The Christian's Daily Walke* (London: Henry Overton, 1631), 4<sup>th</sup> edition published in 1631, with further editions in 1643, 1649, and 1668; Henry Hickman, *The Believer's Duty towards the Spirit, and the Spirit's Office towards Believers* (London: Sa. Gellibrand, 1665), and Lewis Bayly, *The Practice of Pietie* (London: John Hodgets, 1618), first published in 1618 and reprinted frequently throughout the century.

<sup>64</sup> Eleanor Stockton, *Diary*, DWL, MS 24.8, fol. 4<sup>v</sup>, 5<sup>r</sup>.



However, in spite of Eleanor's early attempt to stabilise assurance through a written covenant, her diary becomes a testament to the wavering nature of her faith, and to the difficulties she had in trying to redress that through her reading of the Word. It registers a continuing preoccupation with the status of her soul, as in the following entry 'Upon New Year's Day':

In the morning of that day I went upon the worke of selfe examination and very desirous I was to find out what my preasant state and condition was namely wheither I was still in the state of nature or in a lapst and backsliding condition but not being able to find out my state I was much cast downe til the lord brought this folowing scripture to mind Job 33. 27 18<sup>65</sup>

Job 33.27 reads: "He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which is right, and it profited me not", and Job 33.18: "He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword". In citing those passages Eleanor was clinging to a previous comfort, as noted in an earlier entry:

I lernt that Christ justifieth even ungodly ones and that such as doe know them selves to be ungodly both may and ought to believe in Christ that through him they may be justified.<sup>66</sup>

The writing out of such scripture references was not only a setting in view of evidence that authorised hope; it was also a physical appropriation of divine writ, an 'incorporation' of it into one's spiritual / textual 'composition'. The process whereby consoling scriptures might be revisited was also facilitated by scripture tables, as recommended by Ambrose and practised by Heywood. Eleanor allocated pages of her diary for the categorising of passages according to their affective properties, whether that be "comforting", "reproving" or "reviving".<sup>67</sup> It was a way of trying to contain the shifting affective power of the Bible; to direct and, when necessary, revive its workings upon the heart. However, the pages set aside for the task are largely empty, and it seems that Eleanor's habitual approach to the Word was more passive. Like others she found scriptures cast into her mind like a voice from without, but she also surrendered herself in a different way to the powerful autonomy of the sacred text. She would open the Bible at random and believe the first passage she came across to be divinely directed to her particular condition. Thus her handling of the Book was an enactment of God's will; it was saving reading at its most rudimentary, yet magical, level. If Eleanor believed that God's grace was working through her hands as she opened the pages of her Bible, nonetheless something of that power spilled over into the object of the book itself. Spontaneity and the live moment were no longer placed in opposition to the written word, but were

<sup>65</sup> Eleanor Stockton, *Diary*, DWL, MS 24.8, fol. 13<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> Eleanor Stockton, *Diary*, DWL, MS 24.8, fol. 12<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>67</sup> Eleanor Stockton, *Diary*, DWL, MS 24.8, fols 6<sup>r</sup>-10<sup>r</sup>.



introduced into her reading through a physical relationship with its materiality. However, such an approach also gave rise to contradictions that could only be resolved through a reassessment of her role as reader, as related in the following entry. It gives an account of Eleanor's relationship with the Word while her first-born daughter, Sarah, is dying:

Upon her growing worse and all that see her concluding she was past hopes my feares began to returne againe for which I was seacritly rebuked and that Scripture brought to mind as I thought by the Spirit of God Job.11.40. Jesus saith unto her saide I not unto thee that if thou wouldst believe thou shouldst see the glory of God by which scripture and ~~with~~ the manner of its being brought to me I was againe much revived and tooke the first opportunity I could to read the same and when I tooke the bible into my hand to looke it for [sic] I could not directly tel where it was But the first place I did open and fix my eye upon was that very. Ii. Of John the 40. ver. at which I was astonished and at present verily conformed that it was the mind of God that I shoud take incouragement to believe that though he brought her very low yet he would spare her life and another scripture which I red about the same time I was much affected with and it run much in my mind it being so very sutable to the present dispensation, it was psal. ii9.49 Remember the word unto thy servant upon which thou hast caused me to hope which hope continewed in me til death a proached very neere and when she was a departing the suggestions of satan prevailed so farr upon evel heart as to cause me to question the faithfullness of God whose providenc as I then thought seemed to contredict his word which I was verily perswaded *then* was suggested to me by his holy spirit. But I must now judg my self for misjudging the meeneing and will of God in this dispensation towards me under this trying providence.<sup>68</sup>

Whereas Owen Stockton recorded only the comfort he derived from Scripture upon the death of (a different) daughter, Eleanor struggled more openly with a Word that seemed to lure her into false hope. Up until this point in her diary, Eleanor had sought to demonstrate her loyalty to the Lord through a written covenant, and through a diligent reflection upon her reading of the Bible, but here a momentary rebellion is acknowledged as for once she questions not her own "faithfullness", but that of her God. However, her account is retrospective, and it ruefully recasts a reading that was too full of faith into one of Satanic suggestion. Eleanor Stockton had failed to walk the tightrope between despair and complacency that was the lot of every Calvinist. True to the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of reading, she sought to understand God's will through an affective engagement with Scripture; when that misled her, however, the fault could only be her own. It was her duty to correct her way of reading, to 'judge myself for misjudging'. The phrase falls back upon itself, much as she was required to do by a model of saving reading that reserved interpretative ability within a text that was 'self-authenticating'. Eleanor had to introduce a hermeneutic re-reading to her faulty experience of the Word in order to come to terms with her error.

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<sup>68</sup> Eleanor Stockton, *Diary*, DWL, MS 24.8, fol. 18<sup>v</sup>.



Through her diary Eleanor Stockton explored various ways of trying to write herself into a condition of assurance, and closely implicated in that process was a re-negotiation of her experience of reading the Word. However, the difficulties she encountered remained close to the surface, and the final entry, written in a shaky hand, suggests that her struggle continued unabated:

The sorrow & trouble of parting with my Deare and onely child being attended with so many aggravating circumstances is very great *which I cannot nor may not express* the Lord in mercy speedily fitt me to follow her that I may bid adue to all this world, I have lived long, & must I still be longer in this miserable world. *[my italics]*<sup>69</sup>

Eleanor's diary began with a promise and ended with a prayer: it moved from human agency to passivity, and her final entry is an embittered admission of defeat. If there were simply not the words to convey the depth of her suffering, neither was its expression permissible within a theology that demanded trust in God's justice as a precondition of one's salvation. It no longer seemed possible to reconcile experience and assurance by inscribing her reading. Eleanor Stockton's diary ends not because she grew old, but because she lost faith in writing.

The diaries of Oliver Heywood and Owen Stockton are relatively confident in their presentation of a saving relationship with the Word; the tensions in Eleanor Stockton's text are less concealed. The diary of Isaac Archer is in many ways the most complex of the four, and like Eleanor Stockton's, it not only fails to secure saving reading through inscription, but ultimately calls into question the act of diary-writing itself. Unlike Heywood or Eleanor Stockton, Archer does not make use of such set-forms as the written covenant, but instead negotiates his reading through extended narrative entries. However, as will be seen, his diary aspires in a different way to a performative power of writing saving reading – a power it ultimately fails to realise.

Isaac Archer (1641-1700) studied at Trinity College, Cambridge, and renounced his Independent background to take holy orders in the Church of England. However, he remained ambivalent over the issue of conformity, and uses his diary to re-negotiate his uneasy relationship with the experimental Calvinism he had inherited from his father, and which he could never fully shake off. He began his diary in 1659, and continued it until his death. His diary is a leather-bound volume written in a clear, regular hand. Archer took some care over his book, adding his own page numbers, margins, and adding decorative ornamentation to the front fly-leaf – features that will prove to be pertinent to Archer's conception of his work.

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<sup>69</sup> Eleanor Stockton, *Diary*, DWL, MS 24.8, fol. 25r.



Having been raised a strict Calvinist, Archer spent his early adulthood moving backwards and forwards between conformity and non-conformity, largely due to conflicting pressures from his Independent father and from his conforming associates at university. He recollects how while at Cambridge he was

“about 2 yeares in suspence betwixt 2 opinions, whether I should goe to the meetings in the towne and colledge, or not...my conscience would make me almost yield sometimes, yet to keep my credit in the colledge I refrained still”.<sup>70</sup>

Later, “when the common prayer was forced, and the other ceremonies”<sup>71</sup>, Archer shifts to non-conformity, but under pressure from his collegiate acquaintances, wavers again, inciting the anger of his strictly Calvinist father<sup>72</sup> in the process:

I must confesse, conversing with green heads, and being back’t by others, I wrote sawcily enough to my father in defence of the common prayer, and he as sharply wrote against it. He wrote mee word that he never thought that one sprung from his loynes would plead for Baal; and that if he thought I adored those abominable idols, and danced to that molten calfe etc. he would come and stampe it to powder, and make mee drinke it etc., ...and said he wished he had followed mee to my grave when he let me goe to Cambridge...to learn such things as I did. He said ‘twas vomit which the nation cast out 20 yeares agoe...and said he did loath them the more because, when young, he did them and was caught in that snare.<sup>73</sup>

Clearly, the conflict was deeply felt, and significantly, it focused upon a prayer-book that flouted experimental Calvinist distrust of formalism. It was not merely a sectarian squabble, for, as discussed in Chapter Three, salvation depended upon a truly affective relationship with Scripture. When William Archer warned his son to give up his folly and “study heart converting, and experimental truths”<sup>74</sup>, he was pleading for his soul. Isaac Archer was later to regret his reading-rebellion, not only because “it had bin better that I had never heard a word of common prayer then to make my father my enemy by it”, but also because throughout his life he could not shake off a fear of “formality, and customarines in God’s service”.<sup>75</sup> Even during his periods of conformity he continued to worry over its “humane inventions”:

<sup>70</sup> Isaac Archer, *Diary*, DWL, MS 24.8, p. 49.

<sup>71</sup> Archer, *Diary*, DWL, MS 24.8, p. 49.

<sup>72</sup> Matthew Storey argues that William Archer “had strong Independent sympathies, and was in all probability a Congregationalist”. Storey, ‘Introduction’, *Two East Anglian Diaries*, p. 22.

<sup>73</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 49.

<sup>74</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 54.

<sup>75</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 75.

<sup>76</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 32.



Now to mee conceived prayer was best, because it followed my afections, and was the language my wants dictated to mee: by this meanes I had a grudge upon mee when I read the service because it affected mee no more.<sup>76</sup>

Isaac Archer's practice, then, veered under pressure between conformity and non-conformity, but he remained attached to the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy that privileged affective spontaneity above set forms in the relationship with the Word. He also remained bound to the punitive theology of experimental Calvinism, and of all the diarists he appears the most afflicted by anxiety over his election.

Like Eleanor Stockton, Isaac Archer knew that he must "be made to believe in him that justifieth the ungodly",<sup>77</sup> but he was less circumspect in expressing his doubts. His entries reveal a mind that was often "full fraught" and in want of a "vent", "burdened with cares about my soule's state".<sup>78</sup> For Archer, as for others, it was not only a lack of faith that worried him, but also the difficulty of recognising it if and when it came: "The lord in mercy carry on his worke so distinctly that I may not only have grace, but know that I have it! Amen!"<sup>79</sup> Of course, the expression of such anxieties also served as a safeguard against sinful complacency; they certainly pleased his father, who was "overjoyed to hear of such a change in me", and who apparently told his son that his "despairing, and distrust of my heart and salvation was the safer way of perishing". However, Isaac's life, and text, are characterised by a two-way agonising - between non-conformity and conformity, father and peers, past and future - and it is likely that he would also have felt genuinely torn between the polarities of salvation and damnation. There is no reason to doubt his admission that he continued in "dismall thoughts of death, hell, and judgement", and that his father's advice failed to "comfort mee, or make me thinke there were hopes of mercy for mee".<sup>80</sup>

Isaac Archer's anxiety over salvation was played out in his relationship with the Bible. In his private engagements with the Word, he made the usual experimental Calvinist distinction between diligent labour, and saving reading:

I observed that in reading God's word I could not frame my heart aright, and as I would, nor could I meditate on it, as was my duty, by reason of many idle and evill thoughts which came in, but were very unwelcome. However I was diligent in reading the scriptures every day, and read them once through in a yeare for the 3 first yeares according to Mr Bifield's directions; yet gate I not much good for want

<sup>76</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, pp. 60, 98.

<sup>77</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 38.

<sup>78</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 24.

<sup>79</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, pp. 78-9.

<sup>80</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 35.



of meditation. I took notes also out of the Bible and putt it under such heads as might [illegible – 'suit'?] any state of life what so ever.<sup>81</sup>

Archer associates lawful but unregenerate reading with copious textuality (including the kind of Scripture tables drawn up by Heywood and Eleanor Stockton). However, such reading remained inert unless transposed to the inner meditative voice of the mind. As one would expect, Archer identifies saving reading of the word with its aural reception. He writes that at first any heart-workings he may have felt on hearing the word were fleeting in their effect: "Neither would any sermon stay long with mee, but the watchfull enemy would sow his tares among the good wheate of the word".<sup>82</sup> Subsequently, his response is more enduring:

By God's providence I went to a sermon, which was taken out of the Proverbs, so directly against my sin of slaundering and backbiting, that I thought verily God directed the preacher to speake particularly to my case, and it [deletion; illegible] stuck so by mee that after that I was carefull to avoid that sin.<sup>83</sup>

Archer is clearly constructing a retrospective narrative of his reading that would conform to, and serve as evidence of, conversion. However, it is significant that the sermon which made the most impact upon him should have been directed at a verbal sin, for Archer's relationship with the Word was made problematic by a speech impediment.

Like Oliver Heywood and Owen Stockton, Archer was ordained, but unlike them, he experienced profound difficulties in carrying out his ministerial role. Archer suffered from a stammer, and he wrote about it in the narrative of his early life that begins his diary:

I had an impediment in my speech, I know not how I came by it, but I have heard I was not borne so, neither was it natureall so much as acquired, though now I thinke it was naturall for the organs of speech are not so well framed as in others; and I believe will continue so until my dying day... My tongue was cutt 2 or 3 times, but I gott no good; at last there came a man that pretended he would cure mee, and thrust his fingers into my mouth, and broke or bruised the strings of my tongue, and thus instead of doing me good he did me hurt.<sup>84</sup>

As a child Archer found that his stammering interfered with his ability to pray and to read aloud from the Bible. Furthermore, he had to defend himself against invidious comments that it was a sign he was reprobate. Other children would not allow him to pray with them "because my speech was

<sup>81</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 38. Archer is probably referring to Nicholas Byfield, *Directions for the Private reading of Scriptures*, (1618). Some time later he mentions that he read "in Mr Rogers his book of faith, viz. That there must be legall preparations before faith is wrought in the soule". (He is possibly referring to Richard Rogers, *Certain Sermons... to establish and settle all such as are converted in faith and repentance* (London: T. Man, 1612).

<sup>82</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 37.

<sup>83</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 39.

<sup>84</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, pp. 10-11.



stammering, and they saide God would not heare me". Archer claims he was unperturbed, and was supported by the knowledge that "Moses was heard for all his slownes of speech".<sup>85</sup> His stammer also incurred reprimands from a father who was frustrated in his attempts to educate Isaac in reading the Bible:

I remember, my father would make mee read the Bible; which, through an eager desire for play, and that inbred corruption whereby I hated all things that were good, I cared not for; this unwillingness to read, and stammering when I did read did tire out his patience, so he would let me leave off; thinking withall that I stammered on purpose to be from my book, though in that he was mistaken for I never coulde helpe it, and would give much that I were free from it.<sup>86</sup>

Isaac's stammer was judged not only by his peers and by the stern figure of his father, but also by his schoolmaster:

It may be God laid this upon mee to teach me to bridle my tongue, wherwith since I have offended God and man, friend and foe; for I had a kind of sagacity in speaking and replying bitingly and smartly as others have told me; yea, so provoking was I that my master would say that in Ovid, *lingua fuit damno* etc. would be true of me: but yet I hope, through God's grace, he will prove a false prophet.<sup>87</sup>

Isaac regards his diary as an opportunity to defend himself against the misapprehensions of others, but it is not surprising that, under pressure of opinion, he should begin to entertain the possibility of their view of his stammer as a judgement from God. His affliction brought him into conflict with authority and with custodians of the Word, and his diary is concerned above all to try and reconcile those clashes. Alongside his attempts to justify his own actions and opinions, he laments his own "spirit of contradiction, and crossegrained humour", and regards his stammer as a correction to the tongue that could express such 'biting speech'.<sup>88</sup>

For Isaac Archer then, speech was problematic, and orality the site where his relationship with authority – be that his father or his religion – was conducted. His stammer also made it difficult for him to inhabit the role of authoritative public reader himself when the time came:

<sup>85</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 18.

<sup>86</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 10.

<sup>87</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 10.

<sup>88</sup> Archer's distrust of the tongue was of course part of a more widespread Puritan unease. Among experimental Calvinists, Isaac Ambrose is probably the most exhaustive in his depiction of sinful speech. He exhorts his readers to "Peruse with a broken heart and bleeding affection the many kinds of those sins of the tongue... Blasphemy, mumuring, Defence of Sin, Swearing, Forswearing, Lying, Equivocating, Slandering, Flattering, Cursing, Railing, Brawling, Scoffing, Giving ill counsel, Sowing seeds of discord amongst Neighbours, Double-tonguednesse, Boasting, Discovering of Secrets, Hasty or indiscreet threatening, Rash Promises and Vows, Idle words, Loquacity, or Immoderate talkative – Filthy talking, Scurrility, or foolish jesting, Tale-telling, Railing of rumors, Sinful silence, Rash censuring, Malicious informing, Whispering." Ambrose, 'Media', p. 65.



February 28. I was troubled at my stammering, for I found it something worse now, whether upon change of my diet, or any other cause, I know not: but I resolved to beare it patiently, and look upon it as the hand of God upon mee, for abusing my tongue before to his dishonour and the hurt of my selfe, and others.

By reason of this infirmity I had the harder taske in preaching, for I chose words smooth and easy, and in the very act of speaking, when I mett with stoppings in words, I was forced to invent synonymous words etc., and to adde to my trouble the devill would be tempting mee to leave of the ministry, but that I withstood, and resolved to employ what gifts I had to God's glory, and the good of his church, if he would make use of mee.<sup>89</sup>

Alongside his stammering, Archer felt his position compromised by his inability to "speak experimentally":

When I discoursed with some that would tell mee their experiences in God's dealings, and feeling the grace of God in their hearts, and their knowing that they had faith etc., it troubled mee that I could not speake so experimentally as they, yet would I not discover my case to them for shame, because I look't upon it as such that I who was their minister, should be outgone by those whom I taught.<sup>90</sup>

However, in some respects his stammer was also a guarantee of experimental speech, for he was simply unable to utter set forms of words. Archer cites that inability as one of the reasons why he left off conforming, and in that respect his stammer guaranteed what was, in experimental Calvinist terms, a truer relationship with the Word:

because also I had an impediment so as I could not read anything that was sett mee, though words of my owne chusing in prayer and preaching I could speake so well, that some of my enemies thought I dissembled, but God knowes they were mistaken.<sup>91</sup>

The difficulties Archer had in coming to terms with his stammer became a conduit for the expression of his anxieties over non-conformity. He wrote his diary in order to try and resolve the many conflicts that ran through his life; to restore his damaged linguistic and religious confidence, each implicit in the other. One might expect that, of all the diarists, his broken speech would have spurred him to invest most in the textuality of his enterprise. However, unlike Heywood or Eleanor Stockton, he makes no attempt to restore a wavering faith through textual devices such as written covenants that captured both performative presence and permanence. His diary is ultimately less concerned with the absence of assurance than with the presence of his father, and, by extension, his father's

<sup>89</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 88.

<sup>90</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 88.

<sup>91</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 102.



beliefs. Experimental Calvinists were obsessed with the unknown legacy left them by predestination; Isaac Archer translated that anxiety into ambivalence over his inheritance from his mortal father – an inheritance that was equally conditional upon the practice of true faith. That is reflected in his diary in a kind of writing ‘war-fare’; in a lengthy account of their correspondence, Archer’s holograph struggles for autonomy against the encroachment of his father’s competing texts. Ultimately, Archer’s diary aspires to a performative act of restitution for his disinheritance, but is unable to realise that ambition.

Much of the tone of Archer’s diary is self-justifying; it provides an opportunity for him to define himself against, and in relation to, his father, and the punitive, inescapable authority of the theology he stood for. However, just as his father’s views held sway over his life, so his father’s texts infiltrated his writing. He recounts how the sermons he preached were largely indebted to those formerly delivered by William Archer:

My father gave mee a book in writing of those sermons he first preached at Halsted, which I prized much... I thought I could goe in no better way...then diligently to peruse my father’s sermons, and preach upon those texts, and compare his notes, and inlarge or leave out as occasion served... my ambition was to imitate my father...I made his zeale and fervency in preaching a patterne to my selfe, so that many wondred and were amazed that such things should come from one so young as I was.<sup>92</sup>

If it was hard, on many levels, for Archer to find his own voice as a preacher, his private writing is also dominated by the words of his father. The early entries are scattered with allusions to William’s comments, reprimands and advice, but become completely subsumed when Isaac devotes eight pages to a record of their correspondence.<sup>93</sup> Isaac is clearly writing with his father’s letters to hand, for his account of them is highly detailed, and each is numbered and dated. Of course, Archer imports his father’s letters into his own text in order to appropriate them, and to re-tell their relationship from his own perspective. However, the copying is also an act of submission. His task is fuelled by guilt after William Archer’s death, and he seeks to re-write his own wayward past into a more dutiful, and respectful relation with his father, as is clear from the following passage:

He wrote that to disobey one’s Father would be against one, and a sting to the conscience all one’s dayes: and I find it a sting indeed, now he is dead: I was young and knew not what I did; surely I should not have done it, had I knowne what I did...but that I might have peace; and God can give it yet, Amen!<sup>94</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 89.

<sup>93</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, pp. 136-143.

<sup>94</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 138.



Isaac's own words become buried under the textual legacy of his father, but they emerge again to give an account of financial *disinheritance*. As recorded in early entries, William repeatedly threatened to strip his son of his "estate" due to his disobedience;<sup>95</sup> the theological parallels are striking, for Isaac's conformity carried with it the risk of losing a more spiritual estate. However, later in his diary Isaac re-manipulates his original account, and one suspects that he does so partly in order to legitimise his deviancy from his father's theology (and, in particular, from experimental Calvinist attitudes towards the Word.) He argues that, on re-reading his father's correspondence, he became more clearly aware that he was finally disinherited not because of his religion, but because of his choice of wife. In this way Isaac 'justified' his moral right to an inheritance forbidden him. If it was impossible to rebel against the unfairness of God's unmeritable justice, there was dangerously transgressive relief to be found in questioning that of a patriarch scarcely less powerful. Once again, however, Isaac's attempt was rooted in the problems he had himself in fulfilling an authoritative paternal role. He admits that he labours to justify his disinherited status

so that my children may know (if God please) that for their mother's sake, and because I could not (nor ought not) take my love from her, and would not take a worse, I loose, and they are gainers.<sup>96</sup>

If the *autonomy* of Isaac Archer's diary was threatened by the voice of his father, preserved from beyond the grave through writing, its *ontology* was undermined by his admission that he hoped his own children might read his text. Indeed, throughout his diary one can discern his awareness of a future potential reader – most notably in the heavy, censoring deletions he makes.<sup>97</sup> That apprehension is caused by his own discovery of a diary written by his father:

I found an old written book of experiences of God to him: in which he confesseth some infirmities which he was guilty of ... Who would thinke that the same vaine, filthy, lewd thoughts should be in both of us! It may be 'tis more generall, but that men conceale them, and my father wrote down his thoughts. I have confessed them to God, but I dare not make them knowne.<sup>98</sup>

Archer's diary is in fact written as one link in a chain of texts, to be passed from father to son; his sense of its place in part of a longer family history is made evident from the genealogical table he draws on the back fly-leaf, which traces his family back as far as his great grandfather who died in 1569. As such, Archer seeks a performative textual means by which to revise the chain of

<sup>95</sup> See, for example, an entry in 1661 in which Isaac records: "I mused on what my father had said last, that he would not owne mee etc., whether I conformed or not, and thought my selfe compelled to conforme to get a livelihood...he threatened to disinherit me". Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p.57. In fact, at his death William Archer left his estate in trust to his grandchildren. Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 132.

<sup>96</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 139.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, pp. 58, 59.



inheritance denied him by his father; a gesture that tries to restore not a financial, but a spiritual legacy. However, his project turns, against his will, into a testament of disruption to that lineage. The first part of his diary struggles to come to terms with his disinheritance; after his father's death, his diary increasingly becomes an account of his failure to produce his own future heirs, the very readers for whom his text is intended, and who alone can effect his 'conversion'. The later entries provide a detailed, and harrowing account of what is summarised in a table on the back fly-leaf opposite that of his ancestry: the births and deaths of eight out of nine children and his failure to produce a son. The bottom of the page was left empty for possible subsequent additions, but a line was later drawn across it in slightly paler ink; one can only imagine what it cost Archer to make that mark. In his diary Archer broke free of the conventions of secrecy surrounding self-examination in order to assert himself against the misjudgement of others, but his text was returned to its solipsistic origins in spite of itself. In that respect, his diary made explicit an ambivalence towards the reader pervading all these texts; like the Scripture they sought to negotiate, diaries both courted, and rejected, external interpretation. It was to be left to conversion narratives and spiritual autobiography to exploit the role of external readers in securing salvation.

Isaac Archer's fraught relationship with experimental Calvinism was focused upon disputes between formal and experimental reading of the Word. His stammer disrupted his relationship with Scripture; although ambivalent as to whether it aided or hindered 'right reading', nonetheless it encouraged Archer to invest in a spontaneous affective approach, even as social pressures to conform pushed him in the opposite direction. If his anxiety over experiential and formal reading was a symptom of a deeper anxiety over salvation, both found expression in a complex textual response to the legacy of his father's experimental Calvinism, and to the very notion of inheritance. Archer's diary was text as tribunal; a forum where his own words could compete with those which he inherited from his father. However, in order to liberate himself from the Calvinist 'will' of that punitive figure, and write himself into saving reading, it was not enough that Isaac should produce a private testament. His diary needed a beneficiary, an external reader, and that, its author singularly failed to produce.

## Conclusion

The Experimental Calvinist diary holographs that are known to survive utilise a range of strategies by which their authors sought to take hold of assurance through re-writing their reading of the Word. Owen Stockton and Oliver Heywood both tried to uphold the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of reading that privileged passive experientialism above hermeneutic agency: Stockton through

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<sup>98</sup> Archer, *Diary*, Cambridge UL, Additional MS 8499, p. 134.



cautious reiteration of Word-given assurance, Heywood through written covenants that aspired to a performative function. Neither, however, overtly engaged with the tensions between experiential and hermeneutic reading, nor did they explicitly acknowledge the fact that such a relationship was implicit in the very act of writing a diary – an act that was predicated upon the contradiction of preparation within predestination. Eleanor Stockton and Isaac Archer were less able to conceal their troubled relationships with the Word, and both engaged more explicitly with the tensions between the two experimental Calvinist models of reading in the attempt to negotiate their anxiety. However, ultimately neither were able to write themselves into saving reading, and their failures also called into question the very use and purpose of composing a diary. The diaries of all four represent the flawed beginnings of an art of writing saving reading, an art that was to be further developed in conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies.



## Chapter Five

### “What I was, what I am, and what I shall be”<sup>1</sup>: The Conversion Narrative and the Experimental Calvinist Anxiety of Reading Salvation

#### Introduction

Conversion narratives were testimonies of spiritual progress from legal to saving reading of the Word. Originally spoken aloud before the congregation of a separatist church, they were assessed as evidence of a potential member’s visible sainthood:

Everyone to be ADMITTED, gives out some EXPERIMENTAL Evidences of the WORK of GRACE upon his SOUL (for the CHURCH to judge of) whereby he (or she) is CONVINCED that he is REGENERATE, and RECEIVED of God...<sup>2</sup>

Allusions to the delivery of such testimonies can be found in church books of the period, and while some narratives were circulated individually, most survive in the form of three edited collections that were all published in the early 1650s: Henry Walker’s *Spiritual Exercises of Sundry Beleevers* (1652); John Rogers’ *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh* (1653); and Samuel Petto’s *Roses from Sharon or Sweet Experiences* (1654).<sup>3</sup> This chapter examines the use of the conversion narrative as a strategy for ameliorating anxiety over assurance through a negotiation of the relationship between the two experimental Calvinist models of reading (experiential and hermeneutical), and considers the impact of the move into print upon that enterprise.

The precise origins of the conversion narrative are difficult to trace, although important Congregationalists such as Owen cited the authority of both Scripture and of eminent Protestant divines in its defence.<sup>4</sup> In his preface to the *Savoy Declaration*, Owen argued that

Confession of the faith that is in us, when justly called for, is so indispensable a due all owe to the glory of the Sovereign God, that it is ranked among the duties of the first commandment, such as Prayer is, and therefore by Paul yoked with faith its self, as necessary to salvation: With the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rogers, p. 439.

<sup>2</sup> Rogers, p. 354.

<sup>3</sup> Petto’s *Roses from Sharon* was published in a single volume with *The Voice of the Spirit*. It may be noted that the practice of oral testimonies continued throughout the century, while, with the exception of Charles Doe’s short *Collection of the Experience of the Work of Grace* (London: Charles Doe, 1700), which contained two testimonies in addition to Doe’s own, no more collections appear to have been published after the 1650s. (Doe’s collection is excluded from this chapter on the grounds of its late date.) Testimonies were instead increasingly published as individual accounts, introducing a different relationship between author and text that determines their inclusion, for the purposes of this study, among the genre of spiritual autobiography addressed in the next chapter.

<sup>4</sup> On the conversion narrative and the Savoy Declaration of 1658, see chapter two, pp. 63-64.

<sup>5</sup> *Savoy Declaration*, sig. A.2.<sup>1</sup>.



The connection between faith and confession was central to the conversion narratives that grew out of the oral testimonies required by churches of their members. A key biblical text was Romans 10:9: "For if thou shalt confesse with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt beleve in thine heart, that God raised him up from the dead, thou shalt be saved."<sup>6</sup> Patricia Caldwell provides the most thorough analysis in *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression*, but even she is forced to acknowledge that "Nobody knows who gave the first full-fledged conversion narrative – or when, or even where it was heard."<sup>7</sup> If the precise stages of their development remain obscure, nonetheless one can certainly look to the particular pressures exerted by double predestination as a generative force behind the conversion testimony; the highly structured entry procedures of gathered congregations provided a comforting substitute for the apparently arbitrary selection methods God employed in decreeing the elect. The dual employment of the Congregational principles of fellowship and separation as a means of establishing spiritual security is made starkly apparent, for example, in H.W.'s testimony in *Spirituell Experiences*, in which he observes: "What fellowship have Beleevers with Unbeleevers?"<sup>8</sup>

The editors of the published narratives openly acknowledged (albeit to different degrees) the problem of anxiety over discerning salvation, and the role conversion testimonies could play in alleviating it. In *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh* Rogers suggests that faith is a matter of perception, and that the difficulty of reading one's status is a key impetus behind the narratives. He argues that the question is not "How to be fully perswaded" one has faith, but "How to *know* you are fully

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<sup>6</sup> Romans 10.9, *Geneva Bible*, fol. 73<sup>r</sup>. Augustine had also recounted in his *Confessions* how the orator Victorinus had delivered a testimony of his faith, a practice that was then in Rome "the custome". Augustine, *Confessions*, p. 225. It is unlikely that Augustine was a direct source in this respect, but the influence of the *Confessions* upon experimental Calvinism in general, and upon the autobiographical writing it produced in particular, is more complex than has been acknowledged. Paul Delany, in *British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century*, argues that seventeenth-century spiritual autobiographers "returned to the fountainhead of the Pauline epistles and, with a few exceptions, were remarkably little influenced by the *Confessions*...Conservatives in religion, who would have known Augustine's works, tended to write restrained autobiographies in which Augustinian fervour and self-accusation were carefully avoided. The Baptists and other enthusiastic sects were closer to the spirit of the *Confessions*; but his works were probably too scholarly and expensive for them, since he is very rarely mentioned in their writings." Delany, p. 31. It is indeed unlikely that the *Confessions* were widely read; there were only two translations published during the seventeenth century, in 1620 and 1650. Importantly, however, Owen had clearly read the *Confessions* by 1674 (a point that Delany appears to have missed), for he wrote a lengthy recommendation of it in his work of that year, *Pneumatologia*, and went on to comment: "In my judgement, none of our Divines, ancient or modern, have equalled, much less exceeded him, in an accurate observation of all the secret actings of the Spirit of God on the minds of men, both towards and in their conversion." Owen, *Pneumatologia*, p. 137. Owen's comments postdate the publication of conversion narratives, but he may of course have been familiar with the *Confessions* many years earlier. Augustine, then, had already established a link between conversion, confession and autobiography in his *Confessions*, and it was a work of which certainly some experimental Calvinists (among them the influential Owen) would have been aware. Delany also notes that the Psalms were of course another prime biblical source for autobiography, and observes that Calvin alludes to them throughout the *Institutes* "twice as often as any other book of the Old Testament...and more frequently than any other book of the New Testament". Delany, p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> Caldwell, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> Walker, p. 134. H.W. is alluding to II. Cor. 6.14: "what felowship hath the righteousnes with unrighteousnes?" Geneva Bible, fol. 85<sup>r</sup>.



persuaded” [my italics]; the distinction is revealing of the layers of uncertainty accreted by the dictum of ‘justification by faith alone’. Rogers remarks that

I have been the longer on this point, because many people run *hudling* on headlong in... And poor souls! What comfort can they find in this way, without faith, who stagger through unbeleef, and cannot tell (being full of doubts) whether they are right or no!<sup>9</sup>

However, Rogers retreats from his own insights, countering such concerns by robustly asserting that assurance is self-evident:

Now do but minde these men, how much they differ from what they were before their assurance of God’s favour and love... before they did but smoak, now they flame; before full of faintings, palenesse and shiverings, now full of faith, of ruddy complexions, lively and vigorous...before durst not draw nigh the Lord, but now durst run into his arms, and leap into his lap...What a change is here!<sup>10</sup>

As will be seen, Petto was to go further in examining the problem of reading salvation, but all conversion narratives were founded on the implication that spiritual status could be made readable and sainthood visible. Furthermore, conversion was measured through accounts that ‘demonstrated’ a clear progression from legal to saving reading (the narratives in Walker’s and Petto’s collections conclude with listed “demonstrations” of conversion). However, as mentioned in chapter two, the very notion that election could be judged by human eyes and ears was a source of contention between the separatists and other non-conformists. Allegations of blasphemy produced more cautious equivocations from the separatists. Most notable was John Cotton’s statement that the judgement of potential saints was not infallible, but based upon ‘charitable conception’. This was reflected in the Savoy Declaration of 1658, which made provision for admonition and excommunication (the necessity of which is anticipated in *Spirituell Experiences*, which contains a letter warning other congregations of an individual “cast out” for his “notorious crimes and ungodly walking...least hee should creepe into your Communion”<sup>11</sup>). As with so many other aspects of Calvinism, contradiction and instability accompanied attempts to reduce the strain of a punitive theology. Just as the practice of diary-keeping was founded upon the paradox of preparation within predestination, so conversion testimonies, rooted in a blasphemous notion of visible sainthood, were undermined by their own ontology.

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<sup>9</sup> Rogers, p. 251.

<sup>10</sup> Rogers, p. 376.

<sup>11</sup> Walker, sig. U11<sup>v</sup>.



As a result, it is necessary to scrutinise closely what appear, on first sight, to be simple testimonies of Word-given grace, in order to identify a subtle manipulation of the two experimental Calvinist models of reading – experiential and hermeneutical – as a means of securing assurance. The previous chapter considered how Presbyterian diarists sought to redress the perplexed experimental Calvinist relationship with the Word and with grace through attempts to invoke both the presence and the permanence of assurance through inscription; it saw how, frustrated in that ambition, their texts instead ventured into narrative and retrospection. Conversion narratives continue that shift away from a performative language of presence towards the inscription of permanence, and in so doing they constitute another stage in the developing experimental Calvinist art of reading salvation.

The dual status of these narratives as oral testimony and as published collection is vitally implicated in that development. Consequently, this chapter looks first at the conversion testimony as an oral event, and finds that it imitates the orthodox experimental model of reading assurance through the word, but cannot shake off a residual ambivalence towards its own ambition to secure salvation by surrogate means. Next, the movement into print and the implications of publication are assessed. It is found that the metamorphosis of testimony into text, and the shift in reader-relations that goes with it, radically alters the experiential model of reading on which the conversion testimonies were first founded. Presence is yielded up as conversion gives way to the more realisable aims of preparation and permanence. However, the publication of three collections of conversion narratives does not in itself confirm a move away from the experimental model of reading; the practice of oral testifying continued alongside and beyond its printed counterpart. Rather, the structure and content of the published narratives reveal a tension between the two experimental Calvinist models of reading (experiential and hermeneutic) and deploy a range of strategies in its alleviation: where voice and body were the mediums of experiential reading during the oral delivery of testimonies, narrative and inscription assert their role in the interpretation and resolution of experience in their printed form.

By treating conversion narratives as both oral and textual entities, and examining them as part of a developing experimental Calvinist art of reading, this study breaks new ground. Indeed, there have been relatively few critical engagements with the conversion narrative: Owen C. Watkins, Nigel Smith, and Patricia Caldwell have made the most notable contributions to our understanding of the field.<sup>12</sup> Watkins notes the high degree of conformity of structure within each collection, and goes on to examine the more diverse individual conversion narratives that were independently written.<sup>13</sup> Unlike Watkins, the present chapter excludes individual narratives from its enquiry on the grounds

<sup>12</sup> See also Charles J.G. Griffin, 'The Rhetoric of Form in Conversion Narratives', *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 76 (1990), 152-163.

<sup>13</sup> Watkins, pp. 37-48.



that their individual authorship and publishing provenance align them more properly with the beginnings of spiritual autobiography, the subject of the next chapter. In *Perfection Proclaimed*, Smith draws more extensive comparisons between the three collections, noting that John Rogers's is "more radically spiritual" and that

Walker's congregation seems to be more traditionally Calvinist, with a greater emphasis on sinfulness. Rogers's congregation is more prepared to express the sense of Christ being within the regenerate individual, a 'free gratian' stance rather than open Antinomianism.<sup>14</sup>

Smith's reading of the narratives is primarily concerned with the relationship between self, spirit and bodily experience, and the ways in which the testimonies become part of experimental and prophetic discourse. Neither Watkins nor Smith make much attempt to engage with the conversion testimony as an oral event, but Caldwell's analysis is more alert to the linguistic issues raised by its origins:

To the opponents of conversion testimonies, language is generally divisive and suspect, a threat to "that little goodnesse" that is in the saints; to the advocates of the narratives, language can be a force – if in some ways a mysterious one – for cohesion among these "good soules", despite its externality and imprecision...

In the end, the value and efficacy of a profession are not in the speech nor even in the speaker but in the joint action of speaker and audience – that is, in the words being spoken, heard and *believed*... on this fragile web of literary relation – of literary faith, really – rests the whole weighty issue of the conversion narrative.<sup>15</sup>

However, Caldwell does not investigate the nature of that "fragile web of literary relation" as part of a wider experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading, nor does she ask how the shift into print might have changed it, or why. This is a shame, for in suggesting that the agency of conversion lies less in the letter or content of the testimonies, than in the relationship between speaker and auditor, Caldwell unwittingly draws our attention to a parallel between the performative mode by which oral testimonies operate, and the experimental Calvinist model of saving reading – a parallel considered in this chapter. Moreover, she tends to diminish the role of individual anxiety over assurance as a generative force behind conversion narratives, arguing instead that they served not so much as a way of getting the church to "underwrite" the experience of individuals, but rather as a means of endorsing the community as a true church.<sup>16</sup> While the point is surely that the anxiety was *both* collective *and* private, her dismissal of the latter means that she fails to locate the linguistic issues raised by the testimonies in the context of the theological dynamics which occasioned them. This in

<sup>14</sup> Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, p. 38. On the three collections, see pp. 33–45.

<sup>15</sup> Caldwell, pp. 105, 107.

<sup>16</sup> Caldwell, p. 107.



turn means that the connections between the experimental Calvinist anxiety over salvation and their reading of the Word, and the different strategies employed by oral and published narratives to redress them, go unrecognised. In its attempt to explore such questions, then, the present chapter offers a new approach towards the understanding of conversion narratives.

### The Conversion Testimony as Oral Event

It has already been suggested that there was a fundamental instability underlying the practice of oral conversion testimonies as rites of passage into a church of visible saints, a practice that implied spiritual status was readable by humankind even as it retreated from allegations of blasphemy behind such screens as the notion of 'charitable conception'. That instability was reflected in experimental Calvinist ambivalence towards the nature of the oral event: whether it in some way constituted an act of conversion, a movement of the Spirit; or whether it was merely a surrogate indication of something that had happened at another time and place. In turn that ambivalence was reflected in linguistic acts that both aspired to, and retreated from, the performative re-enactment of the presence of grace.

On one level, a public declaration of assurance, and its communal ratification, could fortify the individual against private doubts. Rogers and Walker endorsed the common perception that testimonies were a means of sustaining assurance against the temporal onslaughts of spiritual waverings. They acknowledged that grace often vacated the soul, leaving only the crutch of memory behind. Walker's suggestion that the raft of past spiritual experience could sustain the drowning soul in times of crisis pleads not the permanence of grace, but endurance in the absence of assurance:

And when Christ is with-drawne within the vaile, and the wings of faith clipped, and the floods of temptation overflow, and overwhelme the poor, distressed, doubting, despairing and drowning soule: this barke keepes, and holds up the soules head above water, till the Arke returne.<sup>17</sup>

There is nothing theologically improper in Walker's affirmation of the nourishing of hope through memory, advice extended by Rogers into a collective, rather than a private, memory of grace:

they being openly attested and approved, the Saint's are thereby often advantaged for future attempts, and troubles...*experiences embolden* them that have them (and others too) and strengthen them for the future.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Walker, sig. A3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Rogers, p. 372, 385.



Rogers focuses more explicitly on the comfort to be had from telling one's experience and having it affirmed by others. However, his adoption of the word 'experiences' as a synonym for the testimony of experience (a common usage among the separatist community) suggests that a more far-reaching power was accorded to such relations. Rogers's conflation of the event, and the telling of it, was a linguistic gesture that aspired to catch hold not only of the memory, but also the presence of grace. The implication was that a testimony was not simply a secondary account of grace, but in some way partook of grace itself.

The identity between 'experience' (an affective awareness of grace) and 'experience' (the testimony of an affective awareness of grace) was located in the body, a natural site of presence:

Experience...is the inward sense and feeling, of what is outwardly read and heard...Experience is a Copy written by the Spirit of God upon the hearts of beleivers.<sup>19</sup>

Experience turns the recipient into an animated text, a living Letter, even before he or she has opened their mouth to speak. The metaphor recurs in all three collections. Petto commented that

As Christ the spirituall Aaron, doth beare the Names of spirituall Israelites on his heart: so, they also bear his Name on theirs.  
They are the Epistle of Christ, and have his will written by the finger of the Spirit on their inward man.<sup>20</sup>

Rogers wrote that "hear-say" becomes "have-say",<sup>21</sup> as language is possessed, internalised and 'incorporated'. Anne Kibbey has argued (through an analysis of Calvin's sacramental theory, its mediation through Perkins, and infiltration by elements of classical concepts of 'figurae') that Protestant Iconclasm has been "deeply misunderstood", and she asserts that Puritans believed in themselves as "living icons". (She goes on to relate this to the idea of the church as a "mystical body", an idea that particularly dominated the founding covenants of gathered, 'embodied' churches.)<sup>22</sup> Just as experience became 'copy', so 'copy' became corporeal.

Orality and textuality merged, and, in keeping with the paradoxical structures of Calvinist thought, the saints achieved 'visibility' through sound. By siting the readable in the body, interpreter and interpreted were collapsed into union through a language of spiritual presence comparable to that identified with saving reading. Petto, for example, wrote of experiences as "Outgoings of their soules

<sup>19</sup> Walker, sig. A2<sup>v</sup>, A3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, sig. O4<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Rogers, p. 356.

<sup>22</sup> Ann Kibbey, *The Interpretation of Material Shapes in Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 63, 60, 52. On the separatist movement's notion of church embodiment, see Nuttall, *Visible Saints*, pp. 67-72.



towards Christ, and incomings of Christ into their soules” and the church book of Rothwell Congregational Church records how, among others, Elizabeth Coxe “gave an heart affecting relation” on February 28<sup>th</sup> 1682.<sup>23</sup> Walker stated that

That Christian beleeves strongest, that hath Experience to backe his faith, and that Saint speakes sweetest and homest, that speakes experimentally, for that which cometh from one spirituall heart, reacheth another spiritual heart.<sup>24</sup>

Walker’s conception of experimental speech had a broad provenance, but the separatist churches gave it a more defined role. Experimental speech was not only a channel of spiritual communication, but also forged, and endorsed, a community of the converted. Something *happened* because of such speech: saving grace was not just told but re-enacted, and the elusive moment of conversion was given a time and place – albeit a surrogate one.

On occasions the surrogate function of the conversion testimony became more apparent, as when nervous candidates found themselves unable to speak before a congregation. Information about what it was actually like to deliver a conversion testimony is best gleaned from the numerous separatist church books that survive from the period. Persecution meant that congregations often met in barns or private houses,<sup>25</sup> suggesting, as one would expect, that they did not invest in the place of worship as a sacred space. Nonetheless there could be an almost ritualised formality about the procedure for delivering a testimony, as apparent from an entry for the 25<sup>th</sup> December 1656 in the church book for the congregation that later became known as Bunyan Meeting:

We do also agree that such persons as desire to joyne in fellowship, if upon the conference of our friends with them, who shall be sent for that purpose, our saide friends be satis-fyed of the truth of the worke of grace in their heartes, then they shall desire them to come to the next church-meeting, and to waite neare the place assigned for the meeting, that they may be called in. And if, notwithstanding that first satisfaction, it be afterwards thought fitt, that any person so appearing, be yet delayed, that then some of the brethren go forth, and have conference with them, and labour in the wisdom, and spirit of the Gospell, to incourage them to farther waiting, and indeavour the prevention of any temptation, that by the denyall of admittance they may be exposed to. But if the brethren sent forth be not satisfied in the worke of grace in the persons they are sent to, then they shall not desire their coming to the church meetinge.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Petto, sig. O4<sup>r</sup>; *The First Church Book of Rothwell Congregational Church, Northamptonshire, 1655-1708*, transcribed by H.G. Tibbutt (unpublished MS, Bedford County Record Office, CRT 170/4/13, 1968), p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Walker, sig. A3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> The congregations of Keysoe Row, Roxton and Stevington, for example, first met in barns. See *Stevington Church Book* (unpublished MS, Bedford County Record Office, X239/1), p.18; Christopher Stell, ‘Bedfordshire Nonconformist chapels’ (unpublished MS, Bedford County Records Office, CRT 170/9/19).

<sup>26</sup> *The Church Book of Bunyan Meeting 1650-1821* (London and Toronto: J.M. Dent; New York: E.P. Dutton, 1928), p. 17.



It is easy to imagine how such an event might, in fact, render the intimidated testifier speechless. The church book of the Stevington congregation in Bedfordshire, for example, records how between two and four brethren were appointed to hear the experiences of several members unable to speak publicly because of their “bashfullnesse”, and goes into some detail in an entry for the 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1686:

Mary Ball was desired to declare what shee had experienced of the gracious work of God in her soul, to the which shee consented and did begin but could not go on; wherefore 2 or 3 or the society went apart with her, to whom she did relate something; the which one of them did report to the brethren and sisters which waited for it; which did, with what some of us had knowne of her before, satisfy, so that shee was received into the church at the same time.<sup>27</sup>

The practice was not exclusive to the Stevington congregation; by 1692 the congregation in Hail Weston also proposed “to take care that it be so ordered that those that cannot speake publickly before the world, to speak before the church only or some of them”, and it is likely that others followed suit.<sup>28</sup>

One suspects that such anxiety was not merely a customary nervousness at public speaking, but was compounded by the urgency of what was at stake, visible election being dependent upon successful delivery. The willingness of the gathered churches represented above to use intermediaries was a pragmatic concession, but it also suggests a readiness to accept the heart-warming presence of grace at one remove. The shift is not in what is required from the testifier, who must still speak experimentally of the workings of grace upon their soul, but rather, in their relationship with the ‘readers’ who wait in judgement upon them. No longer a performative act of union and belonging demanding a spiritual sharing between the whole congregation through the medium of speech and bodily presence, these hidden testimonies of necessity withdrew from the orthodox model of saving reading.

Experimental Calvinists, then, made an ambivalent linguistic and spiritual investment in the conversion testimony as oral event. On the one hand, the testifier’s role as living copy, the notion of experimental speech, and the communal judgement offered upon a subscriber’s spiritual status, suggested a performative power that not only confirmed, but appeared to re-enact, conversion. Both the permanence, and the presence, of assurance could be achieved through this linguistic act. On the other hand, such aspirations carried with them overtones of blasphemy, and, in any case, could not always be realised. That ambivalence hinged upon the relationship between speaker and reader;

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<sup>27</sup> *Stevington Church Book*, pp. 13, 14, 18; Tibbutt, *Some Early Nonconformist Church Books*, pp. 33-34.



significantly, it is that relationship which is most radically altered by the move away from the oral into print, and which dictates a fundamental change in the function of the conversion narrative.

### The Conversion Narrative as Published Collection

The published conversion narrative can be regarded on two levels, as the relic of an oral event, or as a textual entity distinct from its origins, and it can be hard to tell where one ends and the other begins. If its essential form and content derived from its oral provenance, nonetheless a number of features are particular to its altered condition: a vital shift in the relationship between testimony and reader; the testimony's place in relation to the others that surround it; editorial intervention in terms of style and content; the use of extended narrative; and the materiality of their inscription. It is helpful first to consider how publication altered the relationship between testifier, their testimony, and their readers, for this signals a fundamental change of function and linguistic aspiration. The discussion then proceeds to an analysis of each of the collections, in order to examine more closely how they made use of a range of strategies for securing saving reading as a demonstration of salvation.

All three collections were published in the early 1650s (before the Savoy Declaration of 1658, the first public charter to issue from the gathered churches), and this early date is reflected in the treatises which the testimonies accompany: they defend the practice of separatist churches, and provide rubrics for prospective congregations. The increase of fellowship was a major purpose behind publication. Rogers was the most concerned to spread the glory of God's grace:

I would have every *Church* appoint the *Pastor*, or some others to take up all the *experiences* which the *members* declare, and to bring the *best & choicest* of them into *publique light*, Oh how *beautifull* would they be abroad! And how *sensibly* and forcibly should we *perceive* the unparalleled *appearances* of Gods *love* and *light* as they *shine* more and more towards the *perfect day*! And oh how *obvious* to every *eye* would the *work* which *God* is about be in this *age*! and then we should see how far these *experiences* surpass the *former*, or the *Saints* in *former ages*; and how far our *childrens* will be *before* us.<sup>29</sup>

Both *Spirituell Experiences* and *Roses from Sharon*, however, were more explicitly intended to aid the work of preparation towards sainthood amongst their "sober and spirituall"<sup>30</sup> readers. In the epistle to Walker's book, Powell wrote that

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<sup>28</sup> Tibbutt, p.73. The congregation subsequently moved to St. Neots.

<sup>29</sup> Rogers, p. 450.

<sup>30</sup> Powell, 'Epistle', in Walker, sig. A3<sup>v</sup>.



What hath been Printed of this nature, hath both been acceptable and profitable, to many precious Christians. I hope that this is published for that end, and it will finde the same acceptance, and produce the same effects with others of that nature; for herein you may see not only your owne hearts, but many hearts, and *heart-knowledge*, is both necessary and precious to sincere soules.<sup>31</sup>

The title page of *Roses from Sharon* announced that it was “published for publick Soul-Advantage”; the epistle noted that “the declaring of experiences, is one means which one may expect the Lord will make successful unto the conversion of sinners”, and went on to outline “the many uses and advantages that Experiences serve to” thus:

1. For conviction unto unrenewed men, who never found it so with their soules.
2. For direction and encouragement to such as are in like condition: it may tend much to support, when they be even a sinking, to see others on the other side of the bank...
3. For provocation: when they see what progresse of God, and what communion with Christ they have injoyed therein; it giveth occasion unto their reflecting upon themselves, and may create shame for former negligence, and become a spur to future diligence.
4. For confirmation and consolation to such as at a great distance may be able to say, that as face answereth to face in a glasse, so doe their Experiences to these.<sup>32</sup>

Petto concluded with the comment: “If thou gainst in thy Graces by reading, give the glory of all to God, who...hath given thee grace”.<sup>33</sup> A fundamental shift in the function of the conversion narrative in its published form becomes apparent from his words: whereas the oral testimonies confirmed grace (and on occasion, re-enacted it) among the visible elect, they were published for the benefit of those who were not yet ‘renewed’. This shift had important linguistic consequences. The oral testimony aspired to a performative model of experimental language derived from the orthodox model of saving reading; its printed counterpart was no less indebted to a model of reading the Word, but confined itself to a more limited notion of preparation rather than transformation.

The printed conversion narrative was more concerned to extend fellowship through assisting the labour of preparation than to enforce separation through a model of reading that aspired to a performative power akin to grace itself. Just as the latter enacted conversion through the body as living Letter, so the renunciation of presence in the printed narrative is played out in a model of

<sup>31</sup> Powell, ‘Epistle’, in Walker, sig. A3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, sig. O4<sup>v</sup>, O5<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, sig. O5<sup>v</sup>.



reading that is disembodied and which severs the intimate relationship between speaker/author and listener/reader. Where the oral testimony was an event, the published narrative is a monument. The speaker, or author, is removed from the scene: their words are mediated by an editor (Rogers, for example, comments that he transcribed the accounts from the notes he took down from spoken delivery<sup>34</sup>) and the provenance of the testimonies is collective rather than individual (the authors are identified only by initials, while their homogeneity is a reminder that the author of all is God.) Furthermore, the act of reading is no longer communal but solitary, and where before it was conducted through the external medium of public speech, now it is silent and interior. In another fundamental way, the published narrative inverts the relationship between reader and speaker/text: where before the readers sat in communal judgement upon the speaker, now the text is made judge, as the isolated readers are invited to measure themselves against it. It is now the role of the text, not the reader, to aid conversion.

The conversion testimony as oral event aspired to, and retreated from, a performative language of conversion that was potentially blasphemous; as published text, it increasingly renounced attempts to revive the *presence* of grace in favour of assisting preparation *towards* grace and fixing the permanence of assurance instead. That shift, and the tensions that accompanied it, can be discerned in the form and content of the published narratives themselves, which differ between *Spirituell Experiences*, *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh*, and *Roses from Sharon*. While Walker's congregation was the first to publish (Rogers observes that *Spirituell Experiences* was brought to his attention just after his own work had been compiled<sup>35</sup>), and Petto's the last, the development of their strategies for writing saving reading was not strictly chronological. Rogers, Petto and Walker all subscribed to the experimental Calvinist insistence on both Word and word, Spirit and Letter, but with varying degrees of emphasis; their views are reflected in the extent to which their collections invested in inscription as a means for securing the permanence, rather than the presence, of assurance. Rogers and his congregation leaned towards an experientialism that was almost enthusiast in nature; Walker's congregation was more moderate, and Petto's testifiers most mindful of the need to test one's affective experience against the gospel. Rogers' collection adhered most closely to the experiential model of reading re-enacted in the oral testimonies. While the printed word could not aspire to a performative language of presence, the narratives in *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh* attempted to re-invoke the affective intensity of saving grace, exploiting the new possibilities of editorial manipulation, extended narrative and heightened language to that end. Walker and Petto aspired to a different relationship with their readers, one that sought to encourage rather than to evoke grace; as the

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<sup>34</sup> Rogers, p. 391.

<sup>35</sup> Rogers states that he would have included more "abundance" of experiences but that "I am this very week prevented by a little piece, titled, *Spirituell Experiences of Sundry Beleevers, recommended by Mr Powel*", Rogers, p. 355.



principle of preparation came to the fore, so their texts retreated from the depiction of intense experience and instead developed more sophisticated devices for securing a permanent assurance. The testimonies in *Spiritual Experiences* function more clearly as a published collection, rather than as relics of an oral enterprise: they close with listed 'demonstrations' of regeneration intended to confer stability upon their spiritual frames, and their textuality contributes to that notion of 'evidence'. The two testimonies in *Roses From Sharon* are more complex: they also make use of the listed demonstration, but they are more explicit in their acknowledgement of the tensions between legal and saving reading, and make a greater investment in narrative as a means of exploring and resolving a conflictual relationship with scripture. In what follows, assessments of the general characteristics of the three collections are followed by a more detailed analysis of a single, representative narrative from each, in order to build up a picture of how the published conversion narratives contributed to the development of the experimental Calvinist art of reading salvation.

### Ohel or Beth-Shemesh<sup>36</sup>

As already indicated, unlike Petto and Walker, Rogers was more concerned that his collection of experiences should testify to the glory of God, and win souls for his congregation in Ireland, than that they should aid preparation for grace. Less comfortable than Petto with acknowledging difficulties in perceiving one's status, Rogers showed little inclination to regard the element of personal agency implicit in preparation as a source of help. These factors are reflected in the narratives he edits, which stress the experiential workings of divine grace but make little room for human effort, and which do not attempt to exploit the printed medium for its ability to confer some form of fixity upon assurance.

As with the other collections, the testimonies in Rogers's collection chart a progression from a legal or "formal" relationship with the word to a saving experiential one. They are distinguished, however, by Rogers's division of grace into "ordinary" and "extraordinary" workings, the latter consisting for the most part of visions or dreams. Rogers's subordination of reason to transcendent experience is made abundantly clear not only through the narratives themselves, which abound with dreams and visions, but also from his commentaries upon them. He remarks, in tones reminiscent of Luther, that "those that make reason their guide, do but set a mad unruly horse to be foremost in the team", but

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<sup>36</sup> 'Ohel' is referred to in Exodus 33.7 "Then Moses took his tabernacle, and pitched it without the host farre off from the hoste, and called it Ohel-Moed." A marginal note in the Geneva Bible comments: "That is, the tabernacle of the Congregation: so called because the people resorted thither, when they should be instructed of God's Word". *Geneva Bible*, fol. 41<sup>v</sup>. In Jeremiah 43.13, a marginal note in the Geneva Bible refers to Beth-shemesh as "the house of the sunne". *Geneva Bible*, fol. 326<sup>r</sup>.



his distrust of reason is expressed most emphatically in terms more extreme and enthusiast in character.<sup>37</sup>

Those which are most *extraordinary* of them art uttered in *Dream, Trance, Voice, or Vision*, and *Vision* is taken two wayes, either first *actually*, by the *senses* of the body, and so in some *visible* bodily shape; or else a *potentially* thus, that although the soul (*ut forma*) is joined to the body, yet (*ut materia*) above the body; And yet it uses not any *bodily senses* for such a *service*, but sequesters all *externals*, and the *outward senses* are (as 'twere) *dead*, or asleep, not at all *intervening* to *interrupt* the soule; but when the *soule* is soared up in any *high exigency*, or excellency to see *great things*; or is *intent* upon any rich *discoveries*, as by *Visions, Revelations* or the like, all the *bodily senses* lye (as 'twere) in a *trance*, and all *exterior motions* are quieted and *quashed*, and *flesh* is silent...some of them were (as in an Extermination [sic] to selfe) transported *from darkness into his most marvailous light*, by some extraordinary *medium*, and prevalent *inspirations* and *visions*, or the like; which were taken up and *arrested* by the *intellectual* and *cognosertive faculties* of their *soules*.<sup>38</sup>

At the end of the collection, Rogers briefly reminds his readers that the dreams, voices and cries described in the previous pages "were not to be observed in themselves as in the effects...of them",<sup>39</sup> implying the need to measure their validity against the more dependable evidence of good works and godly conversation. However, while this comment gestured towards the experimental Calvinist imperative towards moderation and balance in such matters, the rest of the volume is marked by its editor's fascination with the 'extraordinary'. He notes the need to

contract much their experiences as they were taken, least they be too voluminous: and although in the choicest and most extraordinary ones, I shall gather the stalk longer, least I hurt the beauty and hide the excellency of those flowers; yet without hurt to the rest, in those which are ordinary, I shall be very short

and confesses that "many experiences of inferior glory, and lower appearance, I have purposely omitted" altogether.<sup>40</sup> Admittedly, his awareness of Walker's *Spirituell Experiences* may have curtailed his collection (in his opening epistle Rogers remarks that he would have published more "abundance" of narratives but "I am this very week prevented by a little piece, titled, *Spiritual Experiences of Sundry Beleevers*"<sup>41</sup>). However, it appears that Rogers went on adding narratives even after the original pagination was set,<sup>42</sup> and there is nothing to suggest that his bias towards the "most remarkable" was a response to the more measured narratives of Walker's volume.

<sup>37</sup> Rogers, p. 219.

<sup>38</sup> Rogers, p. 449.

<sup>39</sup> Rogers, p. 450.

<sup>40</sup> Rogers, p. 392, 450.

<sup>41</sup> Rogers, p. 355.

<sup>42</sup> Between pages 412 and 413 in the original pagination, pages numbered 1-12 are inserted.



Rogers, then, was fascinated by the nature of 'extraordinary' experience, and its intensity was recreated in the narratives he edited which gave numerous accounts of dreams and visions. It is likely that his editorial intervention in the testimonies of others was considerable: he acknowledges that they are presented "not so perfectly as they were *delivered*, yet...as well as I can *collect* them out of the *Notes* which I took of them from their own *mouths*",<sup>43</sup> and he suggests that his own state of grace empowers him to give expression to that of others:

The *redoubled experiences* which my *soule* hath had of a *sweet Father*... these *facilitate* my language, and *felicitate* my *lines* to *breathe out* somewhat for others.<sup>44</sup>

However his literary talents are most exposed in his own extended narrative, which provides a graphic account of despair so acute it led him to try to devour his own fingers in response to a God he considered "most *cruell* to exact *impossibilities* of men...and to let so many be *damned*"<sup>45</sup>. In one vision he sees "a broad blade most keen and *cruell*; at which sad sight so fraught with frights, I gastly screeched"; the alliteration escalates as he runs through the sword and emerges the other side "to perpend the perplexible perill which I was in".<sup>46</sup> Rogers's excitable style, however, is not specifically textual in nature, even though his editorial position allows him a lengthier narrative than would be admissible in a spoken testimony. It manipulates the reader's emotions through recourse to techniques that were essentially oral in origin, alliteration depending upon the imagination of sound to produce its effect.

The narratives in *Ohel or Bethshemesh* provided accounts of extraordinary experience that made use of heightened language to evoke the affective intensity that attended the visitations of grace, but unlike their oral manifestations, while such language may have had heart-warming effects on their readers, they were accorded no power to effect or confirm a visible conversion. The reader's task was not to judge the author of the narrative, but to measure their own experiences against those of which they read. For all the evident delight with which Rogers embarks upon his editorial – and authorial – role, for him human language is ultimately a flawed and feeble art:

You have but heard stuttering and stammering to what are to come...which will afford us matter of wordlesse worth, and too high too for any language to delineate.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Rogers, p. 391. There are two exceptions, both placed at the end of the collection. The first is his own narrative, more extensive than the others, and the second that of John Osburn, which Rogers claims to have copied out from the church book in Purleigh, Essex. Rogers, pp. 419–448.

<sup>44</sup> Rogers, p. 449.

<sup>45</sup> Rogers, p. 433, 428.

<sup>46</sup> Rogers, p. 423.

<sup>47</sup> Rogers, p. 449.



His awareness of human limitation is reflected in his lack of experimentation with textuality as a performative tool; that power is reserved for divine, visionary inscription, as in the case of Francis Bishop who drew comfort when

*Moaning (one night) in my bed of a sudden, the room was all alight, and I saw my selfe as in a lightning, and being terrified, I looked till I saw it written in these words, Thy sinnes are pardoned, and thy life is hid with Christ in God.*<sup>48</sup>

To be able to read such writing, one has to be in an 'extraordinary', God-given state of perception. Man's inscription could testify to the glory of God's grace, but could not invoke its saving, performative power.

Rogers regarded his collection as a testament to the glory of God's grace, and was most interested when that manifested itself in wondrous ways. *Ohel or Beth-shemesh* reflects that fascination: the narratives evoke the miraculous intensity of extraordinary experience, while Rogers's commentary is preoccupied with the relationship between body and spirit in the reception of grace. Of the three collections, *Ohel or Beth-shemesh* remains closest to the linguistic character of the oral testimonies. Although the shift in reader-relations means the published narratives do no more than report (rather than enact) the glory of grace, in linguistic terms they still remain preoccupied with the evocation of its presence. Confident that the workings of grace are forceful and unmistakable, Rogers, unlike Petto and Walker, makes no attempt to experiment with the textuality of the narratives as a means to secure assurance through the more humble routes of preparation and perseverance. An analysis of a single typical narrative, that of Elizabeth Avery, reveals a relative lack of sophistication in its structure and form.

Entitled 'A fuller Testimony as it was taken from Elizabeth Avery, out of her own mouth, and declared by her self to the whole church', Elizabeth Avery's 'experience' takes the form of one continuous narrative. Lacking separate paragraphs, the structure of her conversion, and its conformity to a standard movement from a legal relationship with the Word to one that is saving, is brought home by marginal notes added by Rogers. Written in the first person, the narrative records how, as an adolescent, Avery

had an entire love to the *preaching of the Gospell*; O how I longed after it! But alas! We had then no good *Preaching-Ministry* to be had or heard about us!<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Rogers, p. 398.

<sup>49</sup> Rogers, p. 403.



Rogers makes clear her unrenewed status in a brief marginal note: "Called legally. 1. When. 2. How? 3. Effects", and the narrator provides her own retrospective commentary clarifying her spiritual progress:

"I was yet under the Law, and Works until...I could not tell how I was once wrapt up in a light, and hearing something spoken of free-grace, then I melted."<sup>50</sup>

After she has, in Rogers' words, been "called...into light by Free-grace", Avery still undergoes "great afflictions". The loss of three children leads her to despair, but on the death of a fourth she finds herself able to bear it. After this spiritual quietening, God appears to her one day while she is at prayer, and she goes into a trance; Rogers marginal comment observes that she is "Called Evangelically. Extraordinarily in a trance."<sup>51</sup> This 'extraordinary' calling, however, does not bring assurance, until it is (in Rogers's words) "confirmed by ordinarie means, the word." However, her spiritual journey continues to be marked by backslidings and despair, until "*God came in upon my spirit, and gave me full assurance, and I heard a voice say..., [sic] And sorrow thou shalt see no more*".<sup>52</sup> Even then, she is subsequently 'struck in the flesh', but is soon able to recognise her suffering as the healthy punishment of sin. She states that "ever after that I found Christ in me, ruling and reigning and taking all power to himself"(the marginal note confirms that she is "Extraordinarily called"). The narrative concludes: "And thus it continues with me at this day, and the *Lord* leads me on, *higher and higher* in himself".<sup>53</sup>

Avery's testimony falls into a clear pattern, and in his commentary that concludes the section on experiences, Rogers expressly reminds his readers of the structure of conversion common to most of them:

As for those which are the ordinary ones of them, which are call'd home by such means as, preaching, praying, readings, writings or such like; In and by them, if you observe, you shall find a Call twofold, Legal and Evangelical; as to instance in Elizabeth Averies, & c. And note further, those who are first called by the Word, and preaching, are then 2. Confirmed by the Scriptures and promises; and 3. Assured by the presence of Christ revealed in them.<sup>54</sup>

However, while such a structure allowed a progressive movement towards conversion while maintaining the experiential intensity of the absolute moment, it was less successful at imposing closure upon spiritual development, or at securing a permanent assurance. Avery continues to move 'higher and higher', and arrival is deferred.

<sup>50</sup> Rogers, p. 403.

<sup>51</sup> Rogers, p. 404.

<sup>52</sup> Rogers, p. 406.

<sup>53</sup> Rogers, p.406.



Of the three collections, the narratives in Rogers's *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh* remain closest to their oral provenance. While they no longer aspire to the performative power of the oral testimony, they are still concerned above all to evoke the affective intensity of experience as a sign of salvation, and do not embrace the potential of inscription to develop new possibilities for the conversion narrative. No attempt is made to exploit the altered conditions between testimony and reader as a possible aid to perceiving salvation; saving reading remains firmly in the gift of God. Both Walker's *Spirituell Experiences* and Petto's *Roses from Sharon* engage more extensively with the medium of the printed word as a means for redressing the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading salvation.

### *Spirituell Experiences*

In his epistle to *Spirituell Experiences*, Powell distinguished between "brain-knowledge" and "heart-knowledge", and argued that "Experience... seasons brain-knowledge, and settles a shaking unsettled soule".<sup>55</sup> However, the collection places less emphasis than *Ohel or Beth-shemesh* on 'extraordinary' experience, and while many of the narratives tell stories of extreme despair,<sup>56</sup> they tend to be less visionary in nature. (For example, where the narratives in Rogers's collection privilege dreams, in Walker's their intensity can be undercut, as in the narrative of M.K. whose dream of Satan come to take her away turns out to be "the little dogge leaping upon the bed".<sup>57</sup>) Indeed, while there is a high degree of homogeneity between the narratives in *Spirituell Experiences* in terms of structure and content, their editor remains a shadowy figure. Unlike *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh*, in which the editorial intervention of Rogers is pronounced, and in which the testimonies take up only one section of a much longer treatise, the experiences dominate Walker's collection. Running to four hundred pages, with a brief defence of the gathered churches (twenty one pages long) pushed to the back of the book<sup>58</sup>, the title page of the 1652 edition makes no mention of Walker. Authorship is attributed to the "sundry beleevers", although the contribution of Vavasor Powel, whose opening epistle outlines the nature and purpose of the published experiences, is acknowledged.

Another point of difference between *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh* and *Spiritual Experiences* is that the latter were explicitly published with the hope that they might contribute to the work of preparation in

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<sup>54</sup> Rogers, p. 450.

<sup>55</sup> Powell, 'Epistle', in Walker, sigs A3<sup>r</sup>, A3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, the narrative of D.M., who recounts her desire to drown herself in a pond, but is restrained by love for her child, or that of E.R., who is tempted to destroy herself by thrusting a bedstaff down her throat, and swallowing the feathers from her pillow. Walker, pp. 35, 358.

<sup>57</sup> Walker, p. 175.

<sup>58</sup> The defence provides an explanation of how a gathered church is founded, citing the authority of Scripture and of "severall papers presented by way of humble advice from the Assembly of Divines to the Parliament". Walker, sig. U4<sup>v</sup>. It also contains a confession of faith which restates the principles of double predestination in uncompromising terms, and the



their readers: as such, their formulaic structure, reinforced by the sheer number of the collected testimonies, provided a clear pattern that readers might apply as a grid by which to measure their own lives. Whereas Rogers's collection made use of heightened language to evoke the intensity of experience, Walker's was more alert to the shift in medium, and developed aspects of the conversion testimony that lent themselves to their textual status. They continued to provide simple narratives of a conversion from legal to saving reading, but gave equal weight to the listed 'demonstrations' of regeneration which closed them. These 'evidences' attempted to confer stability upon assurance through inscription, and the notion of a 'mark' or 'token' of belief. As already discussed, Powell's epistle to *Spiritual Experiences* described experience as "Copy written by God upon the hearts of beleivers";<sup>59</sup> the textual metaphor is continued when he suggests that the "special" love of Christ "hath so manifestly appeared to his people (especially of late years)" and that many of them "like good Scribes" "have been able to bring things...for the refreshing, comforting, and supplying of many poore souls, which otherwise had been in extreame want and distresse."<sup>60</sup> An intimate relationship between despair, comfort and inscription gathered about the notion of testifier as an amanuensis for God's grace. That relationship can be examined through an analysis of one typical narrative, that of A.O.<sup>61</sup>

As with all the testimonies across the three collections, that of A.O. gives an account of the author's progress from legal to saving reading. The narrative is simple and brief. An awareness of childhood sin meant that A.O. could find nothing but horror in the scriptures:

Severall Ministers and godly people came to mee, and used great means to comfort me, but all in vain for a time; and when I read the Scriptures, I found every threatning and judgement therein, that I fixed my thoughts upon, to speak terror to my soul; and my distraction was so great, that my friends said that I was mad, and kept the Bible from mee. For so often as I did read in it, I pored most upon that dreadfull place, Matth. 12.31 *All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men, but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, shall not bee forgiven unto men.*<sup>62</sup>

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letter warning other congregations of an unsuitable individual previously mentioned. Walker, sig. U8<sup>r</sup>-U10<sup>v</sup>; U11<sup>r</sup>-U12<sup>r</sup>. Overall, it provides an austere index to the principles of fellowship and separation that occasion the narratives.

<sup>59</sup> Powell, 'Epistle', in Walker, sig. A3<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>60</sup> Powell, 'Epistle', in Walker, sig. A2<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>61</sup> Walker, pp. 87-93. The gender of A.O. is unclear from the narrative itself, in keeping with the anonymity that substitutes initials for a full name. Individual identity was considered less important than communal sainthood in these collected conversion narratives, and the notion of an 'ungendered soul' meant that editors would have felt the registration of sex to be incidental to their purpose. The removal of gender furthered the disembodiment of oral testimony through printed word. For further discussion of the notion of the 'ungendered soul', and of the impact of gender upon attempts to write oneself into saving reading, see chapter six, pp. 178-184.

<sup>62</sup> Walker, p. 89.



Like so many despairing Calvinists, A.O. feared he (or she) had committed the unpardonable sin, and it caused him (or her) to lie “for some months in a sad agony wrastling with temptations, perplexed between hope and feare”<sup>63</sup> A.O. goes on to relate how

at last in hearing Mr. W., Minister of B. and reading a book called, the New birth, I found comfort... since which... I have for some yeares past, found much comfort from the promises of God revealed in his holy word, some of which follow.<sup>64</sup>

The narrative makes no attempt to explore the nature of A.O.’s “mad” reading, and is cursory in noting its restoration to sanity through preaching and a work of practical piety. The very simplicity of the narrative is a kind of declaration of confidence, and this is bolstered by its formulaic likeness to the hundreds of other narratives in the collection.

If A.O.’s narrative derives an apparent strength from its lack of sophistication, that falters a little in the closing demonstrations of assurance. All the narratives in Walker’s collection close with between five and twelve numbered “evidences”; A.O. lists six. The numbered list may have had its origins in oral memory and recitation, but it also borrowed some authority from its textuality, as suggested by the visual nature of terms such as ‘evidence’ and ‘demonstration’. The testifiers themselves thought of their evidences in visual terms, even if they were originally spoken rather than written: E.C. (from Walker’s congregation) regarded them as “marks and tokens of my beleaving”.<sup>65</sup> A mark is not only a sign but also a boundary (its etymology derives from the Old English ‘mearc’, meaning boundary or landmark). The demonstrations contain doubt not simply by bringing the author’s testimony to a close, but by curtailing all prospect of further narration: unlike Elizabeth Avery’s experience, which anticipates future continuation (“higher and higher”), a numbered list discards causal progression and replaces fluctuating emotion with unchanging entities. If narrative was about progress and resolution, the inscribed list could confer a welcome stasis upon the flux of spiritual experience. At this point it is useful to recall Paul Ricoeur’s analysis of writing as the trace of experience in ‘Narrated Time’:

The whole enigma of the trace is here... to follow a trace is to effect the mediation between the no-longer of the passage and the still of the mark.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Walker, p. 90.

<sup>64</sup> Walker, p. 90-91. A.O. may have been referring either to William Whately’s collection of sermons titled *The New Birth or a Treatise of Regeneration* (London: [n.pub.] 1618) which ran to several editions, or to John Andrewes’s *The Converted Man’s New Birth* (London: N.O and I.N, 1629) which also ran to subsequent editions. A further work entitled *The New Birth*, by Richard Bartlet, was published in 1654, but A.O.’s narrative precedes that date (Richard Bartlet, *The New Birth* (London: L. Blaixlock, 1654).

<sup>65</sup> Walker, p. 81.

<sup>66</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘Narrated Time’, in *A Ricoeur Reader: Reflection and Imagination*, ed. by Mario J. Valdes (New York and London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), p. 345.



Manipulation of the 'no-longer of the passage' and the 'still of the mark' allowed experimental Calvinists to write themselves into linguistic conversion by the diminishing of despair through narrative, and the fixing of faith through the mark. Whereas oral testimonies were one-off, transient events, and narrative the medium of progressive spiritual growth, the inscribed list offered permanence, reification, and the potential for reiteration.

However, while the demonstrations were intended to impose closure upon the persistent waverings of spiritual doubt, their success was limited. A.A., for example, concedes in one of her demonstrations that she still has "times of doubtings", and L.P. admits in hers that

I doe not live without waines and changes in my spirituall life, and faith towards the Lord, for sometimes I can trust God with all, and at other times I meet with some doubtings.<sup>67</sup>

A 'charitable christian' reading (as advocated by John Cotton) of these demonstrations would conclude that such ongoing doubt was merely a saintly lack of complacency. However, befitting the nature of Calvinist anxiety which entertains two possibilities, a second reading haunts the texts: such demonstrations may in fact be testaments of damnation.

The narratives in *Spirituell Experiences* explored the use of textuality in the form of listed "evidences" of conversion as a means of harnessing assurance, but with limited success. The testimonies in Petto's *Roses from Sharon* returned to a more complex use of narrative in the attempt to resolve tensions between legal and saving reading, and thereby secure assurance.

### *Roses from Sharon*<sup>68</sup>

Like Walker, Petto suggested that testimonies could aid the spiritual preparation of others (as already seen, he regarded the uses and advantages of experiences as conviction, direction, encouragement, provocation, confirmation and consolation<sup>69</sup>). Publication was an extension of the "declaring of Experiences" that he regarded as "one means by which we may expect the Lord will make succesfull [sic] unto the conversion of sinners."<sup>70</sup> His editorial input into the two testimonies in *Roses from Sharon* is evident not stylistically (as with Rogers), but rather in the selection of the material, which closely reflects the issues discussed in the accompanying work, *The Voice of the Spirit*. As

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<sup>67</sup> Walker, p. 75, 233.

<sup>68</sup> The title of Petto's work alludes to Isaiah 33.9, in which Sharon is referred to as a "wilderness" after devastation caused by God's wrath. *Geneva Bible*, fols 293<sup>v</sup>–294<sup>r</sup>. The implication is that the testimonies in his volume, the 'roses' of Sharon, are signs of regeneration.

<sup>69</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, sig. O5<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, sig. 4<sup>r</sup>.



previously discussed, Petto, more sensitive to anxiety over conversion than either Rogers or Walker, devoted his treatise to the “perplexitie” that could arise over the witnessings of the Spirit<sup>71</sup> (an anxiety which the oral testimony could not entirely redress). Indeed, the work outgrew the testimonies of grace it was supposed to introduce, as Petto ruefully admitted:

When I first set about this worke, I aimed to have the greatest part of this Treatise made up of Experiences: and only to usher them in with a short preparatory of my owne: but contrary to my intendments, and something to my affliction, my owne discourse hath so swelled in my hands, that it doth crowd these Experiences into a little corner.<sup>72</sup>

Part of the reason for Petto’s expansiveness was a recognition of the need for experience to be subjected to scrutiny, given the doubts and anxieties that could attend the workings of the spirit. When *The Voice of the Spirit* and *Roses of Sharon* are read as a single volume, they produce the impression that the analysis of experience is a vital corollary to the experience itself. The workings of grace had to be tested against “the written word”:

The works that have passed upon thy heart being discerned, thou mayest examine and measure them by the written word whither they be speciall or common: if thou be’st ready to doubt and question whither these be sufficient to testifie adoption or not, by renewed recourses to the Word, thou mayest finde what they are: whether they be such as that calleth graces or not, & c. It is said of the Chymicks that they will so counterfeit gold, that no touch-stone can discover it: Satan hath a great deale of Chymistry, he hath many things like graces, as faith, hope, humility, & c. which are not those graces; and therefore it behoveth the most confident soules often to try their grounds, and here is a touchstone the written word that will never faile; this will discover his most glistening counterfeit coyne.<sup>73</sup>

Ascertaining one’s spiritual condition, then, demanded both experimental and hermeneutic modes of reading; the testimony of A.M. tries to resolve tensions in the relationship between the two. Like the testimonies in *Spirituell Experiences*, A.M. makes use of the numbered list as an affirmation of conversion: there are twelve “Effects” of conversion, followed by five reasons why the author can be sure “that these things proceeded from the Divine Spirit, and were not Delusions of Satan”.<sup>74</sup> As with the testimonies in Walker’s collection, the closing demonstrations cannot fully expunge the fact of ongoing anxiety: A.M. worries what “if I should loose the presence of God what would become of me, it would be worse then ever”.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, a sense of the limitations of such demonstrations is suggested by the beginnings of their formal collapse. No longer distinct from the preceding narrative,

<sup>71</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, p.71. For previous discussion of Petto’s comments on the “perplexitie” of discerning the workings of the Spirit, see the introduction, pp. 8-9, and chapter three, pp. 110-111.

<sup>72</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, sigs O4<sup>r</sup>, O4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>73</sup> Petto, *Voice of the Spirit*, p. 167-8.

<sup>74</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, p.19.



the habit of listing spills over into the rest of the testimony: heart-warming scriptural passages and temptations both receive numerical treatment, although here it is used simply to order material that remains sequential. (That assimilation is even more marked in the second testimony in *Roses from Sharon*, in which the narrative is built up of themed sections concerning believing, temptation, corruption, the spirit's working, the hindering of the work of the spirit, and desertion, each with numbered paragraphs and sub-paragraphs.) The absorption of the 'list' back into 'story' is telling, for in Petto's collection it is primarily through a more extensive and sophisticated use of narrative that the two experimental Calvinist models of reading are negotiated.

A.M.'s conversion is played out more closely in terms of its author's relationship with Scripture than the narratives in *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh* with their simple movement from a formal, legal state to one of regeneration. On first glance, A.M.'s testimony appears to conform to the orthodox experimental Calvinist insistence on saving reading as an experiential response to the word rather than a hermeneutic engagement with it; the narrative charts a story of reading that progresses from "understanding" to "affection". Within that basic framework, however, something more complex is going on. The two models of reading appear to be almost integrated: A.M.'s experience of saving grace is always mediated through Scripture, and the Spirit resolves, rather than replaces, hermeneutical difficulties. As the narrative progresses, however, a tension between the two models of reading becomes apparent. A dramatised vocal struggle between Satan and the Spirit gives expression to the anxiety that accompanies A.M.'s attachment to Scripture, and to the re-reading of experience through it.

Throughout A.M.'s narrative, emphasis is placed less upon the intensity of extraordinary experience, than upon the reconciling of hermeneutic conflicts through the workings of the Spirit; interpretation is not transcended by grace, but resolved through it. At the beginning of the narrative, A.M. notes how

In the night, waking, I being very well, my understanding clerer then ever, Scriptures were cast in very thick, and without anything of my recollecting them, or study for them; and cleare interpretations came in with them. And it was by enlightening, not by voyce... I was made capable at that time of those Scriptures that formerly I could not understand, my objections were removed...by comparing Scripture with Scripture, that were cast in, those that heretofore seemed to disagree, were reconciled, and made one, and all the Scriptures were confirmed to me, to be one truth. Many Scriptures that were darke and mysticall, were made cleare to me, which before I knew nothing of, and the interpretations very spirituall.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, p.15.

<sup>76</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, p. 2-4.



(The narrator goes on to give a detailed account of some of the scriptures in question.) There is some ambiguity as to whether or not the event constitutes an experimental relationship with the Bible. On the one hand, there is a heart-melting merging of self into Word:

The Lord did cause me to understand, and my heart was melted into the stillnes of this voice, and of those things which I did see; I was formed into them. I found a nullifying of selfe.<sup>77</sup>

On the other, A.M. is at pains to point out that his or her power of reading remained limited:

I did manifestly see abundance of glory in this ministration. Yet, not so much to raise my affections: But rather committed to my understanding (as I apprehended it) then to my affection. I did understand that it was God.<sup>78</sup>

Similar episodes recur, but A.M. comments that "it was rather committed still, to my understanding, then to my affection"<sup>79</sup>, a point borne out by the inability to recall nocturnal insights in the cold light of day:

After in the day I had something of what I thus injoyed in the night; and I would then have recollected, and have considered what it was, but I could not; my heart fainted, and presently I fell into a cold sweat. I could not review or recollect for a Quarter of a yeare.<sup>80</sup>

It becomes apparent that before A.M. can progress to a truly saving relationship with the Word, he/she has to renounce their attachment to the Letter of Scripture. A.M. is reluctant to do so, and the ensuing struggle is typically externalised as a tussle with the devil, whose influence competes with that of God:

It came upon me, do'st thou not see, thou hast lost the use of reason... I could not reflect but wholly attend to Satan. And Satan gave me Impulsions to goe read, and try to pray, suggesting to me, thou hast nothing to pray, thou hast seen God, and needest not faith.<sup>81</sup>

The association between Satan and the impulse "to goe read" is a revealing indictment of a Letter-bound relationship with the Word. A distinction is made between sinful reason and godly reflection, but both are subsumed in an agonised cry to God to help him/her in their hour of temptation when they have "neither faith, nor feeling".<sup>82</sup> Any sense of personal agency or empowerment A.M. may have derived from his/her relationship with scripture is replaced with humility and a more orthodox

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<sup>77</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, p. 3.

<sup>78</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, p. 4. The gender of A.M., like that of A.O., is unclear. On the issue of gender, see footnote 61 above.

<sup>79</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, p. 7.

<sup>80</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, p. 6.

<sup>81</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, p. 10.

<sup>82</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, p. 12.



and proper sense of impotence. The battle over right reading continues, but Satan now launches another angle of attack, accusing A.M. of idolising the Scriptures. Finally A.M. is supported by some

sweet refreshments and distillations of the Spirit, that came in thus: "Not the letter, but the Spirit that wrote the Scriptures."<sup>83</sup>

With this awakening A.M. discovers the difference between legal sorrow and gospel sorrow, but it is a revelation that surpasses language and which cannot be communicated: "my heart was melted into that Gospel sorrow: but I am unable to declare particularly how it was with me here, for a world."<sup>84</sup> For all the value Petto ascribes to the declaring of experiences, ultimately, as with Rogers, the narratives he edits argue that conversion lies beyond the reach of human discourse.

Conversion should bring with it the cessation of narrative, but A.M. cannot stop worrying away at his/her relationship with the Word, or the need to recount it, and the narrative topples into an excessive re-reading that threatens to undermine the experience of assurance. On the one hand, A.M. remains "troubled that I should be inordinate in desiring the joy of the Spirit;" on the other, he, or she, finds it hard to trust in the 'enlightenings' alone:

I perceived that my astonishment did often arise from the coming in of things so suddenly: but, when I saw my condition was not contrary to Scripture, but agreeable to it, then my heart was quieted.<sup>85</sup>

Significantly, scriptural consolidation is not included among A.M.'s closing evidences that the experiences were the work of God and not the Devil, suggesting a final lack of resolution in A.M.'s reading of the Word.

A.M.'s testimony made a more sophisticated use of narrative than any of the testimonies in either *Ohel or Beth-Shemesh* or *Spirituell Experiences* in the attempt to negotiate the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading, but was still finally unable to resolve the tension between experiential and hermeneutic relationships with the Word, or to assimilate the work of preparation into saving reading.

### Conclusion

Conversion narratives were a product of the experimental Calvinist anxiety over spiritual status, and they employed a range of linguistic strategies in their attempt to lay claim to the saving reading

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<sup>83</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, p. 13.

<sup>84</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, p. 12.



required of the elect. In their oral manifestation, the testimonies both aspired to, and retreated from, a performative re-enactment of grace that was potentially blasphemous. Such an empowering adaptation of the experiential model of saving reading could not readily be accommodated within the strictures of Calvinist theology, and in their printed form the testimonies renounced such ambitions. Instead, they provided templates against which their readers might strive to fit their own experience. Abandoning the performative possibilities of the oral testimonies, the printed narratives endeavoured to assert their textuality for its ability to confer permanence upon assurance. However, the attempt met with limited success, and instead the published testimonies began to look again at the potential for narrative to resolve tensions in the reading of salvation. A.M.'s narrative oscillated between positive and negative constructions of the Letter, and that ambivalence towards the hermeneutic reading of salvation was to further preoccupy spiritual autobiographies. The movement away from the performative language of presence, towards a more sophisticated (and disembodied) manipulation of narrative in the quest to secure saving reading, was continued in the spiritual autobiographies that are the concern of the following chapter.

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<sup>85</sup> Petto, *Roses from Sharon*, pp. 15, 18.



## Chapter Six

### “Living Monuments”: Spiritual Autobiography and the Experimental Calvinist Anxiety of Reading

#### Introduction

Through the writing of diaries, and the delivery and publication of conversion narratives, Presbyterians and Independents sought to redress the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading salvation. In so doing, they gradually retreated from linguistic gestures aimed at securing the presence of assurance. Instead, they sought to confer stability and permanence upon their shifting spiritual frames by rehabilitating the hermeneutic re-reading of experience through the increasing manipulation of narrative. The explosion of spiritual autobiographies after the 1640s continued that developing ‘art of reading’ across sectarian divisions: both Presbyterians and Independents exploited the form as the most effective means of addressing the perplexities of saving reading. However, they could only do so by departing from the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy that privileged experience over interpretation, Spirit over Letter.

Any distinction made between spiritual autobiographies, diaries and conversion narratives must of necessity acknowledge the hybrid nature of many of the texts, and the slippage between each genre. As might be expected, spiritual autobiographies betray their origins in diary and conversion narrative: diary entries are sometimes incorporated verbatim into the texts, and their narrative structures are often closely affiliated to the testimonies which marked a progression from ‘legal’ to ‘saving’ reading. In this context, the key distinguishing features of spiritual autobiography are the use of a single author as a unifying principle of the text, and a drive towards more extended and complex narrative structures. These features are best regarded not as fixed co-ordinates marking a distinct genre, but rather as points of equivocation about which spiritual autobiography negotiated the project of reading salvation. It has been seen that diaries explored ways of invoking presence through the signature and the hand-written covenant, and conversion testimonies through the spoken word and the notion of ‘living copy’. In spiritual autobiography divine presence increasingly gave way to human agency, and the issues raised by this clustered around constructs of authorship. Ensuing tensions were given appropriately paradoxical expression in the concept of the autobiographical text as a “living monument” (a term used in both Vavasor Powell’s and Joseph Barrett’s posthumously published works)<sup>1</sup>. Ultimately these disembodied texts relied upon narrative to do the work of claiming, and sustaining, conversion; through it they sought to reconcile

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<sup>1</sup> Vavasor Powell, Preface to *The Life and Death of Vavasor Powell*, sig. A2<sup>r</sup>; Barrett, p. 60.



experience with the interpretation of experience, and thereby develop strategies by which to heal their fractured reading of the Word.

The chapter begins by identifying works of spiritual autobiography written by experimental Calvinists in the context of the wealth of such publications produced in the second half of the seventeenth-century. It goes on to examine key features of the corpus in relation to the anxiety of reading salvation, before proceeding to a more detailed reading of three texts: Jane Turner's *Choice Experiences of the Kind Dealings of God before, in, and after Conversion* (1653); Joseph Barrett's 'God's Early Dealings with Mr Barrett' (completed in 1684, and published posthumously in *A Funeral Sermon upon the Death of Mr. Joseph Barrett... to which is added, an Account of his Holy Life* 1699); and John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (first edition published in 1666, with substantial additions to the undated third edition, possibly of 1674, and the fifth edition of 1680). The first two have been selected as examples of both the range of background that produced experimental Calvinist autobiography, and, notwithstanding that diversity, an essential commonality of purpose. Turner was a Particular Baptist, Barrett a Presbyterian; Turner's text was published relatively early, Barrett's late in the period. Turner's gender further complicated experimental Calvinist anxieties about the relationship between judgement and affection, while Barrett's Presbyterianism produced a different set of pressures. Both texts manipulated notions of authorship and narrative structures in the attempt to inscribe saving reading, but their success could only be achieved through re-asserting human agency and interpretation against an elusive divine presence. Finally, the chapter offers an analysis of *Grace Abounding* – often considered “richly exemplary” of spiritual autobiography – against this background.<sup>2</sup> It finds that while Bunyan shares the concern to write himself into salvation through a negotiation of the two models of reading, his text is atypical in its ultimate refusal to deviate from the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of reading in order to better accommodate it.

### Experimental Calvinist Spiritual Autobiography

The hybrid nature of many texts, and the occasional uncertainty of sectarian origin, means that one must regard any statistical evaluations of spiritual autobiography with due caution. Nonetheless, it is helpful to identify a body of work that can be clearly termed experimental Calvinist in nature and provenance, and to state a few figures in order to gauge the output of this community of readers in relation to the mass of such writings that appeared in the second half of the seventeenth century. For

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<sup>2</sup> John Stachniewski, for example, in his introduction to his edition of *Grace Abounding*, argues that it is “a richly exemplary text emerging from a shared cultural experience”. John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding with other Spiritual Autobiographies*, ed. by John Stachniewski (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. ix.



the purposes of this survey experimental Calvinist autobiographies may be defined as extended narratives of conversion and saving reading with a Presbyterian or Independent provenance, published under the authorship of a single person (though not without editorial mediation in some cases). In his bibliography of Puritan autobiographies written before 1725 (published in *The Puritan Experience* in 1972), Watkins cites 240 texts, of which almost exactly half were written by Quakers. However, his definition of 'Puritan' is broad; it includes not only Quakers, but also enthusiasts such as Lodowick Muggleton, and he also numbers the three collections of conversion narratives among his entries. Furthermore, Watkins' bibliography, while extensive, is not exhaustive: in particular he omits the works of Agnes Beaumont, Susannah Parr, and Sarah Davy, whose writings have received attention from feminist critics in recent years.<sup>3</sup> He also terms Anne Wentworth a Quaker, whereas her autobiography makes it clear that she was (at least at the time of writing) a Particular Baptist.<sup>4</sup> As with the diaries discussed in chapter four, there may yet be experimental Calvinist autobiographies "sleeping on the shelves".<sup>5</sup> However, on the basis of current scholarship and research undertaken for this study,<sup>6</sup> it appears that, between 1640 and 1700, twenty-five experimental Calvinist autobiographies were printed, although some were not published until the Nineteenth Century. Two further texts were produced by authors who had close connections with the experimental Calvinist community, making a total of twenty-seven.<sup>7</sup>

Of those twenty-seven texts, nine can be confidently ascribed to Presbyterians. In chronological order according to date of completion rather than publication, they are: Elizabeth Wilkinson's *The Life and death of that Eminent Saint of God, Mrs Elizabeth Wilkinson* (1659); Oliver Heywood's 'Experiments with Reflections' (possibly written in 1679, and published with other autobiographical papers in 1882<sup>8</sup>); Hannah Allen's *Satan his methods and malice baffled. A Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings with that Choice Christian Mrs. Hannah Allen* (1683)<sup>9</sup>; Joseph Barrett's 'God's Early Dealings with Mr Barrett' (completed in 1684, and published in *A Funeral Sermon upon the*

<sup>3</sup> On Agnes Beaumont, see Hilary Hinds, *God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), pp.74-75, 77-80. On Susannah Parr, and Sarah Davy, see *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth Century Englishwomen*, ed. by Elspeth Graham, Hilary Hinds, Elaine Hobby and Helen Wilcox (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 101-15, 165-179.

<sup>4</sup> Watkins, p. 258. See Anne Wentworth, *A Vindication of Anne Wentworth* ([n.p., n.pub], 1677), passim, and Graham and others, p.181. Wentworth is in dispute with the elders of her Particular Baptist community over her desire to publish, but her autobiography gives no clear indication that she defected to the Quakers.

<sup>5</sup> Handley, p. 1. See chapter four, p. 117, footnote 17.

<sup>6</sup> The key published bibliographies covering the field are: W. Matthews, *British Autobiographies: An Annotated Bibliography of British Autobiographies Published or Written before 1951* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1955); and in Delany, pp. 175-185; and in Watkins, pp. 241-259, and, on women autobiographers, in Graham and others, pp. 225-228.

<sup>7</sup> Baxter's *Reliquiae Baxterianae* is excluded from these figures, and from the discussion, on the grounds of the heterogeneity of his position, or 'positions'. See chapter two, p. 80, footnote 99.

<sup>8</sup> A note on the fly-leaf, in a similar hand to the text itself, observes that the book was bought in 1679. Heywood, *Papers*, vol. VII, BL, Additional MS 45, 969. Heywood also wrote other extended autobiographical narratives: see, for example, Heywood, 'Self-Reflections', in *Papers*, vol. VI, BL, Add. MS 45,968, fols 1-29. [The pagination is Heywood's own and runs from the back of the book.]



*Death of Mr. Joseph Barrett...to which is added, an Account of his Holy Life* in 1699); Adam Martindale's *The Life of Adam Martindale* (written up to 1685, and published in 1845); Gervase Disney's *Some Remarkable Passages in the Holy Life and Death of Gervase Disney* (written in 1686, and published in 1692); Edmund Trench's *Some Remarkable Passages in the Holy Life and Death of the Late Reverend Mr Edmund Trench* (written up to his death in 1689 and published in 1693); George Trosse's *The Life of the Reverend Mr. Geo. Trosse* (finished by 1693, and published in 1714); and Henry Newcome's *The Autobiography of Henry Newcome* (written by 1695, and published in 1852).<sup>10</sup>

A further sixteen texts can be assigned to members of the gathered churches (3 by the same author). They are: Henry Burton's *A Narration of the Life of Mr. Henry Burton* (1643); Jane Turner's *Choice Experiences of the Kind Dealings of God before, in, and after Conversion* (1653); Anna Trapnel's *Anna Trapnel's Report and Plea* (1654), *The Cry of a Stone* (1654), and *A Legacy for Saints* (1654); John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666); Walter Pringle's 'The Memoirs of Walter Pringle of Greenknow' (finished by his death in 1667, and published in *Select Biographies* ed. W.K. Tweedie in 1845); Sarah Davy's *Heaven Realized* (1670); Henry Jessey's *The Life and Death of Mr. Henry Jessey* (finished by his death in 1663, and published in 1671); Vavasor Powell's 'Mr Powel's [sic] Account of his Conversion and Ministry', in *The Life and death of Mr Vavasor Powell* (finished by his death in 1670 and published in 1671); Thomas Mowsley's 'An accompt of God's dealings with this young man, before and at his conversion' (finished by his death in 1669 and published in the second edition of *Death Unstung* in 1671); Hanserd Knollys's *The Life and Death of Old Disciple of Jesus Christ, and Eminent Minister of the Gospel, Mr. Hanserd Knollys* (written 'in his own hand' until 1672, and published posthumously in 1692); Anne Wentworth's *A Vindication of Anne Wentworth, tending to the better preparing of all people for her Larger Testimony* (1677); Thomas Goodwin's *The Life of Thomas Goodwin* (written by 1680 and published posthumously in *Works* (1704); Francis Bampfield's *A Name, an After-One* (1681); and William Kiffin's *Remarkable Passages in the Life of William Kiffin* (finished by 1693 and published in 1823.) A further two autobiographies were written by women who either rejected, or were rejected by, Independency.

<sup>9</sup> On Hannah Allen's Presbyterian background, see Graham and others, p. 209, footnote 3.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Wilkinson, 'The Life and death of that Eminent Saint of God, Mrs Elizabeth Wilkinson', appended to Edmund Staunton, *A Sermon Preacht at Great Milton in the County of Oxford: Decemb. 9. 1654*, (Oxford: Tho. Robinson, 1659), pp. 21-36; Heywood, *Papers*, vol. VII, BL, Additional MS 45, 969; Hannah Allen, *A Narrative of God's Gracious Dealings with that Choice Christian Mrs Hannah Allen* (London: John Wallis, 1683); J.W., *A Funeral Sermon upon the death of Mr. Joseph Barrett...to which is added, An Account of his Holy Life, his Evidences, Experiences, Holy Resolves, Divine Meditations, and his Constant Course of Self-Examination, Being Part of an exact Diary written by his own Hand* (London: Tho. Parkhurst, 1699); Adam Martindale, *The Life of A. Martindale*, ed. by R. Parkinson (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1845); Gervase Disney, *Some Remarkable Passages in the Holy Life and Death of Gervase Disney, Esq* (London: Jonathan Robinson, 1692); Edmund Trench, *Some Remarkable Passages in the Holy Life and Death of the Late Reverend Mr Edmund Trench* (London: Tho. Parkhurst, 1693); George Trosse, *The Life of the Reverend Mr. Geo. Trosse* (Exon: R.



Mary Simpson, in *Faith and Experience, or, a short narration of the holy life and death of Mary Simpson* (written by 1647 and published in 1649) described how she had explored Independency and had decided against it; and Susanna Parr, in *Susanna's Apologie Against the Elders* (1659) wrote of her excommunication from an Independent congregation.<sup>11</sup>

Having established a body of experimental Calvinist spiritual autobiographies, the first thing that strikes one is how many of them were published posthumously. Indeed, all the Presbyterian texts were published after the death of their authors, with the exception of Allen's narrative which was published in her own lifetime, although it described events that took place twenty years earlier. The Independent pattern of publication is a little more complex: up until, and including, Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* in 1666, authors published during their lifetimes (with the exception of Goodwin); thereafter, the majority were published posthumously, with the exceptions of Anne Wentworth and Francis Bampfield. (Simpson's narrative was also published posthumously, making hers, along with the Presbyterian Wilkinson's, one of only two experimental Calvinist narratives to be published posthumously before 1671). In *The Puritan Experience* Watkins also provides a brief overview of trends of posthumous publication. His analysis, however, is far from exhaustive, and neither does he distinguish between Presbyterians, Independents and other Puritans. Significantly, he does note that Quakers continued to publish narratives by living authors "long after others had ceased to do so", but the conclusion he draws from this observation is questionable. He suggests that

If any significance can be attached to this development, it might be as evidence for a decline in the belief that current events were the outcome of exceptional initiative on the part of the Holy Spirit; hence there was no longer the same urgency to publicize the experience of individuals. If that were the case, it would

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and H. White, 1714); Henry Newcome, *Diary of the Rev. Henry Newcome 1661-1663*, ed. by Thomas Heywood (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1869).

<sup>11</sup> Henry Burton, *A Narration of the Life of Mr Henry Burton* (London: [n.pub.], 1643); Jane Turner, *Choice Experiences of the Kind Dealings of God before, in, and after Conversion* (London: H. Hils, 1653); Anna Trapnel, *A Legacy for Saints* (London: T. Brewster, 1654), *The Cry of a Stone*, (London: n.pub., 1654); John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (London: George Larkin, 1666); Walter Pringle, 'The Memoirs of Walter Pringle of Greenknow', in *Select Biographies* ed. by W.K. Tweedie (Edinburgh: Wodrow Society, 1845); Sarah Davy, *Heaven Realized* (London: [Edward Calvert?], 1670); Henry Jessey, *The Life and Death of Mr. Henry Jessey* ([London? n. pub., 1671]; Vavasor Powell, *The Life and Death of Vavasor Powell* ([London? n.pub.], 1671); James Janeway, *Death Unstung. A Sermon [on Rev. xiv.13] Preached at the Funeral of T. Mowsley... With a Brief Narrative of his Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Dorman Newman, 1671); Hansard Knollys, *The Life and Death of that Old Disciple of Jesus Christ and Eminent Minister of the Gospel, Hansard Knollys, written in his own hand to the year 1672, and continued in General, in an epistle by Mr. William Kiffin* (London: John Harris, 1692); Anne Wentworth, *A Vindication of Anne Wentworth, tending to the better preparing of all people for her Larger Testimony* ([n.p., n.pub., 1677]; Thomas Goodwin, 'The Life of Dr. Thomas Goodwin composed out of his own Papers and Memoirs', in *Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 5 vols (London: Jonathan Robinson and Thomas Ballad, 1681-1704), V, v-xix; Francis Bampfield, *A Name, An Afterone, or... A Name, a New One, in the Later Day Glory* (London: John Lawrence, 1681); William Kiffin, *Remarkable passages in the life of W.K.*, ed. by W. Orme (London: Burton and Smith, 1823); Mary Simpson, *Faith and Experience: or, A Short Narration of the Holy Life and Death of Mary Simpson* (London: Richard Tomlins, 1649); Susanna Parr, *Susanna's Apologie Against the Elders* (Oxford: [n.pub.], 1659). Agnes Beaumont's *Real Religion* (London: Constable, 1629), the well-known defence of her horse-back ride with Bunyan, and the death of her father, is of course Independent in origin, but is discounted on the grounds that, like many such vindications of the period, it does not attempt to give an account of her spiritual life or conversion.



also help to explain why the Quakers continued to publish narrative confessions by living writers long after others had ceased to do so, for their whole concept of conversion relied more heavily on individual witness to the dynamic operation of the Spirit.<sup>12</sup>

In fact, experimental Calvinists were, if anything, under greater pressure to produce autobiographical narratives of salvation than Quakers, due to the more punitive severity of their theology. Even the most cursory reading of the posthumously published experimental Calvinist works reveals a preoccupation with detecting the presence of the Spirit, and indeed they often justified their very existence as memorials to God's grace.<sup>13</sup> The difference between Quaker and other habits of publication does suggest, however, that experimental Calvinists made a particular investment in posthumous authorship. Presbyterian autobiographies, in particular, were often bound together with other forms of life-writing such as diaries<sup>14</sup>, but the intervention of an editor rummaging through the deceased's personal papers was not the only impetus behind their publication. In any case, the existence of posthumous autobiographies that were not collated with other forms of life-writing, such as Wilkinson's and those of the Independents,<sup>15</sup> suggests another, more important motive for delaying the move into print. The tendency to postpone publication until after death is in fact indicative of a complex disquiet about the whole enterprise of spiritual autobiography, and the act of authorial assertion it required; a disquiet that was intimately related to the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading salvation. It has been seen in previous chapters that diary writing was built upon the paradox of preparation within predestination, and that the conversion narrative was undermined by its seeming adherence to the blasphemy that spiritual status might be discerned by man as well as by God. Both involved acts of human assertion at odds with the divine absolutism fundamental to double predestination. Weak believers could only be reconciled to their theology through deviation from its original uncompromising strictures; such shifts yielded still more contradictions and anxiety. Similarly, the production of spiritual autobiography involved an act of assertion, as individuals sought to reconcile their reading with salvation by writing a narrative that, properly, could only be inscribed by God. Posthumous publication was one way of negotiating the ambivalence towards authorship that accompanied such projects.

Diffident about asserting their public validity, spiritual autobiographies occupied a shadowy territory between public and private worlds of communication. This was the case both in terms of their form, and in the relationship between text and reader. Newcome, for example, undertook the metamorphosis of private writing into public himself, even before that change was completed by an

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<sup>12</sup> Watkins, p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Goodwin, p. xv; Kiffin, p. 2; Powell, p. 19.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, the narratives of Barrett, Disney, Heywood, Trench, and Newcome, among others.

<sup>15</sup> Vavasor Powell's work is the only Independent autobiography to draw explicitly on diary entries. See chapter four, p. 119, footnote 22.



editor: in a practice common to many, he incorporated earlier fragmented writings into an extended narrative, remarking as he did so that his diary "is in my hands".<sup>16</sup> For him, as for others, a projected family readership acted as a buffer between the solipsistic existence of a journal and wider disclosure. Many claimed their work was intended only for the benefit of their family and offspring: Kiffin, for example, claimed he wrote in order to encourage his eighty-eight children, grand-children, and great-grand-children to "love and cleave to God".<sup>17</sup> Such authorial attempts to disclaim a public role for their work could not conceal the fact that publication not only shifted the function of such texts, but also called into question the limits of their original ambition. Others, such as Trosse and Davy, for example, were more explicit in leaving instructions to their executors that their autobiographies be published after their death. In such cases, the absenting of the author through death, and the mediating figure of the editor, stood between the writer and accusations of personal hubris. Ultimately (and unsurprisingly), it is the *paradox* of posthumous authorship which is used to accommodate the experimental Calvinist ambivalence towards attempts to write one's own conversion; it finds expression in a figure who is both absent and yet preserved in a text defined and unified by his or her name.<sup>18</sup> That paradox is evoked in the preface to Powell's autobiography, which articulates the notion of the author / text as "living monument":

The holy Spirit tells us, that whilst the wicked are to perish as their own dung their names rot [sic], and memories blotted out, and cut off from the Earth, that the memory of the Just is to be blessed, to be had in everlasting remembrance, and as an eternall excellency [sic], they are to be the joy of many Generations...they may though dead, yet be speaking, and so become living monuments, Patterns, Examples and Preachers, to them that come after them.<sup>19</sup>

The idea that the dead might speak radically reworked the relationship between orality and presence associated with saving reading. On the one hand, the figure of an author absented through death furthered the move towards a disembodied relationship between author and reader that one can see emerging in the shift between diaries and conversion narratives. The experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of reading suggested that the relationship between reader and Word only became a saving one when quickened by the presence of grace; diaries and conversion narratives both imitated, and withdrew from that model. Spiritual autobiographies dislocated the relationship between author and reader, and the movement of grace that was invested in it, still further. Unlike the conversion narrative, the authorship and reception of spiritual autobiography was no longer an activity

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<sup>16</sup> Newcome, p. 14.

<sup>17</sup> Kiffin, p. 2. See also, for example, Disney, whose anticipated readers were his "mother, sister, and near relations", and Newcome, who wrote for his children that they might "stay mindful of God". Disney, p. iii; Newcome, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> On the unifying role of that "modern character", the author, see Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 49-55 (p. 53) in which he argues that "to assign an Author to a text is to impose a brake on it, to furnish it with a final Signified, to close writing".

<sup>19</sup> Unsigned 'Preface' to Powell, sig. A2<sup>r</sup>.



undertaken and endorsed by a community. Writing and reading took place in isolation, and increasingly communication was channelled through a printed word detached from any bodily origin in speech or hand. As with the printed conversion narrative, this 'dead Letter' could not effect conversion among its public readership, but only aid preparation towards it: Trosse, for example, intended that his text would serve "For the terrifying of Presumptuous and Secure Sinners" the "encouragement" of "sensible" persons, and the "comforting" of the "converted"; and Simpson's editor hoped her narrative would assist in the "soul's profit" of others.<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, however, while there was a physical dislocation between author and reader, the reinstatement of the author's identity in place of the anonymity (or collective identity) of the conversion narrative was also an act of restoration. Unable to enact a model of saving reading whereby the trinity of author, Letter and reader could become a conduit for grace, the elevation of the writer to a position where their name on the title-page became the central unifying principle of the work replaced an elusive divine presence with human agency. Unsettled by such a blasphemous prospect, autobiographers of course rushed to deny it. Powell, for example, assured his readers that

I have set down, not as boasting or seeking praise to myself, but to keep a memorial of the Lord's benefits, and to stir up others, into whose hands these few notes may come, to have confidence in the power and goodness of God.<sup>21</sup>

However, if authors retreated behind veils of modesty, nonetheless tension between authorial agency and divine predestination surfaced in the narratives they wrote. While they sought to tell stories of saving reading, in fact they did so through privileging the model that was properly considered secondary; a mode that was active and hermeneutic, rather than passive and experiential.

Many experimental Calvinist spiritual autobiographers, then, turned to posthumous publication as a means of negotiating their anxiety about the assertiveness entailed in authoring their own narratives of conversion, a role properly reserved to God: delaying the move into print allowed the figure of the author to be both absent and present, and to publish with humility. In the production of such texts, just as the vacuum left by elusive grace was filled by the agency of the author, so hermeneutic re-reading stood in for the fleetingness of more experiential assurance; that process was naturally played out and reflected in the strategies by which the narratives sought to reconcile the experience of grace and its interpretation. An overview of experimental Calvinist works enables one to discern two broad approaches to the representation and enactment of the two models of reading. Some texts are constructed around binary sections that give explicit accounts of the experience of grace followed

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<sup>20</sup> Trosse, sig. A2<sup>r</sup>-A2<sup>v</sup>; Collings, 'Epistle', in Simpson, sig. A8<sup>r</sup>.



by reflection upon it. This enabled experiential reading to be privileged even as it allowed lengthy engagements with the interpretation of experience. Others, however, developed narratives that, while still episodic in nature, went further in implicitly integrating interpretation into saving reading. The shift from a binary presentation of the two models of reading towards one that made use of a more integrated format was not strictly chronological. In part it reflects the dual influences of diary and the conversion narrative, in turn products of the theological and ecclesiological differences between Presbyterianism and the gathered churches. Presbyterians tended to write autobiographies based on binary sections of action followed by reflection, perhaps because such texts grew out of habits of self-examination through diary-keeping, while Independents often produced more seamless narratives that owed much to the conversion testimony, and the specific communal pressures upon them to produce a sequential account of election.<sup>22</sup> However, there is also a substantial element of cross-over, as members of both groups made use of both kinds of structures, and overall there is a more general thrust towards more integrated narrative structures.

The Baptist Jane Turner's narrative is based on a series of "experiences" followed by "observations", and a similar approach is adopted by three Presbyterians in at least part of their autobiographies: Martindale's text is split into short chapters each of which is followed by "observations"; Heywood's work entitled 'Self Reflections' is made up of a series of "experiments" followed by "reflections", though towards the end of his text the structure merges into a more integrated narrative; and Trosse also makes use of a structure whereby "troubles" are followed by "advantages", though again, the form gives way to either to diary entries or to more extended narrative. The structures of all four autobiographies at first suggest that the recounting of experience, and the analysis of it, are separate and distinct activities, yet increasingly they become integrated. A similar pattern can also be seen in another Baptist text, that of Thomas Mowsley (1671). Mowsley adapts the binary approach still further to produce a dialogue between a minister and a convert; interestingly, the answers become longer and longer until the questions disappear altogether.<sup>23</sup>

A move towards a more integrated progressive narrative that still had roots in a binary approach to experience and its interpretation can be discerned in the texts of Simpson and Wilkinson. Simpson's text, like Turner's, is constructed out of a series of dilemmas followed by resolutions, but unlike hers, the 'units' are not signaled by headings, and each episode builds progressively upon that which

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<sup>21</sup> Powell, p. 19.

<sup>22</sup> Dean Ebner has suggested that "Baptists and Independents employ a tight psychological structure, antithetical syntax, mental dialogues...Presbyterians alternate internal and external experience as a structural practice". Ebner, p.13. However, the distinction between internal and external experience is not particularly helpful as it fails to pick up on the more important experimental Calvinist distinction between experience and reflection or judgement. Furthermore, there is more sectarian cross-over between the two approaches Ebner outlines than he allows for; Turner, for example, uses a binary structure for her narrative, while Barrett makes extensive use of mental dialogue, as is discussed a little later in the chapter.



precedes it.<sup>24</sup> Wilkinson's text is notable for the fact that in spite of her Presbyterian background, it aspires to a function similar to that of conversion narrative; she sends her work to a Reverend in the hope that it will gain her admittance to the Lord's Supper.<sup>25</sup> Again her spiritual journey is told as a series of problems that meet with resolutions, only to be supplanted by new problems.<sup>26</sup> Thereafter the roots of autobiography in a binary approach towards the two experimental Calvinist models of reading - of experience followed by reflection - become increasingly obscure: the autobiographies of Bunyan (1666), Davy (1670), Powell (1671), Wentworth (1677), Allen (1683), Barrett (1699, but written by 1684), Disney (1692), Knollys (1692), Kiffin and Trench (1693), for example, all make use of more integrated narrative structures.

The shift from binary to more integrated structures, then, was not strictly chronological - Martindale, Heywood and Trosse were still experimenting with binary approaches until late in the period - and was partly, though not entirely, influenced by sectarian backgrounds in diary and autobiography. Nonetheless, there was an overall trend towards more integrated structures that increasingly accommodated the interpretation of experience, and in this respect experimental Calvinist spiritual autobiography can be said to constitute another step in the community's developing art of reading (through writing) salvation.

Such a cursory overview, however, cannot begin to do justice to the nuances that distinguished individual textual strategies within this general trend. Instead, it is necessary to focus upon only three texts that represent something of that range: Jane Turner's *Choice Experiences of the Kind Dealings of God before, in, and after Conversion*; Joseph Barrett's 'God's Early Dealings with Mr Barrett'; and John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*. Turner used a binary structure, and Barrett a more integrated one, in negotiating the relationship between experiential and hermeneutic reading, and both found different ways of reconciling their acts of authorship to their readers. Their autobiographies suggest an essential similarity of purpose that straddles both sectarian divisions and the development of the form across the period: both could only write themselves into a narrative of saving reading by departing from experimental Calvinist orthodoxy, reinstating human, hermeneutic agency in the absence of divine presence. In contrast, while Bunyan shared their preoccupation with the relationship between the two models of reading, he was not able to countenance such dissent; his autobiography is exceptional in that it moves towards a comparable position only to retreat from it.

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<sup>23</sup> Mowsley, pp. 102-119.

<sup>24</sup> Simpson, *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> Wilkinson, p. 34.

<sup>26</sup> Wilkinson, *passim*.



Jane Turner's *Choice Experiences of the Kind Dealings of God before, in, and after Conversion*

For Jane Turner (a Particular Baptist who believed in free grace)<sup>27</sup> the publication and reception of her autobiography was particularly fraught with conflict, and the transgression of her authorship was closely linked to tensions between the two experimental Calvinist models of reading. Her status as an 'irrational' woman placed a specific set of strains on both her, and her readers' perception of the relationship between "affection" and "judgement", and that in turn impacted upon her attempt to reassert the value of reflection and interpretation as an integral element of saving reading. However, Turner's attempt to reconcile experimental and hermeneutic reading through an act of authorship, while relatively successful, proved contentious, and the condemnation her work received is an indication that such a project could only be achieved by abandoning the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of saving reading.

Jane Turner's text was published in her own lifetime; unlike many other autobiographies, it did not utilise death as an authorial device. Instead the movement from private to public writing was mediated, not through an editor, but through four opening epistles: the first by her husband, two others by John Spilsbury and John Gardner, and the fourth by her self. Her husband's epistle claims his responsibility for the publication of this secretly written work in the hope that it will prove "very profitable" to others:

At my first sight of it, which was when it was neer finished, though I believe I was the first that saw it, next Her self, I was so surprized, knowing nothing of it before, that I knew not what to say of it; but upon consideration, and reviewing of it, I was very much pressed in spirit to publish it.<sup>28</sup>

Turner uses her own "word from the author to the reader" as a further disclaimer, stressing the point that initially she intended her text "only for my own private use...twas not in the least in my thoughts that ever it should have been presented to a publick view".<sup>29</sup> (As might be expected, she cites her tendency to "forget the particulars" of grace, and the value of writing in preserving such memories "in times of trial and temptations", as a key motive behind the work.<sup>30</sup>) Hilary Hinds, in *God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism*, observes that the opening epistle "offers a fascinating account of the processes whereby John Turner gained control of his wife's unsolicited and errant text", and goes on to discuss the ways in which Jane was both passive, and manipulative, in devolving responsibility for her text to her husband.

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<sup>27</sup> Turner, pp. 49, 81.

<sup>28</sup> John Turner, 'Epistle', in Turner, sig. A6<sup>v</sup>, A7<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Turner, sig. B7<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Turner, p. 2-3.



Hinds notes the clash between notions of “unequal bodies” and “ungendered souls” in seventeenth-century figurations of women, and tracks the conflict between temporal loyalty to her husband, and spiritual allegiance to God, in Jane’s writing:

the conflict is between the earthly and the spiritual: the social prescriptions concerning women’s relationship with the printed word, the need for modesty, the requirements for a woman to act only within the boundaries of the familial and the spiritual requirement that she communicate God’s grace clash with each other...Turner’s text is structured around these prescriptions, is in silent dialogue with them, and both complies with and refuses their demands.<sup>31</sup>

Hinds’s critique provides valuable insights into issues common to many female autobiographers of the period.<sup>32</sup> However, she omits to accord John Gardner’s epistle the same degree of critical attention, and it is with Gardner’s epistle that one first becomes aware of how Jane Turner’s status as a woman intersected with her religious need to negotiate a relationship between the two experimental Calvinist modes of reading – and vice versa. Hinds discusses at some length seventeenth-century conceptions of man as reasoned and woman as unreasoned, man as ‘head’, and woman as ‘body’,<sup>33</sup> but she does not comment upon Gardner’s attempt to justify Turner’s authorship on the grounds of her “clear conceptions and sound judgement”. The pressure on women such as Turner to demonstrate rationality coincided with, and received support from, the fears of visionary extremism that kept experience chained to the Letter for experimental Calvinists, as is reflected in Gardner’s epistle:

The Serious minded Christian is the most thriving, especially when the judgement ordereth the affection. Many persons are so drowned in confused and immethodical thoughts, that all their intentions are like an untimely birth, or the grass on the house top. This Author hath obtained favour of the Lord not onely to be esteemed a Daughter of Sion, but also one that excelleth in grace, and to be counted a Mother in the true Israel, of which we have not many. I speak not this by hearsay onely...but having had for some years more than ordinary experience of her clear conceptions, and sound judgement...This precious soul hath conceived and brought forth spiritual fruit...<sup>34</sup>

If there are “not many” elect and serious Christians, Gardner seems to suggest that there are even fewer female ones (Turner is so much the exception that he even associates her productivity as an author with her fertility as a woman). Jane Turner, then, had a dual incentive to emphasise the role of

<sup>31</sup> Hinds, pp. 58-9, 76, 49-50, 78. On the concept of the ungendered soul, see Denise Riley, *Am I that Name?: Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* (London: Macmillan, 1988), pp.18-43.

<sup>32</sup> See, for example, Anne Wentworth, who had to leave her husband, who “in a most cruel manner hindered me from performing, seizing, and running away with my Writings”, in order to exercise the “just and necessary liberty” to publish her autobiography. Wentworth defends herself with the claim that the writing of it was against her own mind and will, but commanded of God. Wentworth, pp. 5, 6, 7.

<sup>33</sup> Hinds, pp. 25-28.

<sup>34</sup> Gardner, ‘Epistle’, in Turner, sigs B5<sup>r</sup> - B6<sup>r</sup>.



“clear conceptions” in her narrative of saving reading, but the stress she placed upon it laid her open to attack from sections of her readership.

Turner’s most vitriolic adversary was the Quaker Edward Burrough, who published *Something in Answer to a Book called Choice Experiences given forth by one Jane Turner* in 1654. Burrough argued that Turner wrote “in notion, and not in power, and in pretended Spiritualities and not really in the Spirit”.<sup>35</sup> Accusing her of acting out of duty “by imitation from the letter without... an abomination to the Lord, for you are without the moving of the Spirit”, Burrough claimed the privilege of presence for his own text, frequently reiterating the point that “I speake it as in the presence of the Lord which shall judge of her and me”.<sup>36</sup> For him, Turner’s attempts to order her encounters with the Word were but “airy imagination and confusion” and he considered her “beguiled” by “thoughts and conceivings”.<sup>37</sup> One would expect a Quaker to be offended by the insistence on the need for human judgement as well as the Spirit in *Choice Experiences*, but it is apparent that Turner met with objections from her own community as well. Turner comments that it is “with grief of heart I must confess, that the greatest discouragements that I have met with have been from the Saints themselves”. Turner tries not to be contentious, arguing that of course it is wrong to encourage the misguided to publish and that she merely wishes to caution the Saints to “take heed of casting stumbling blocks in each others way”. However, bitterness gets the better of her, as she observes that “a slighting of the gifts and Grace of God in others, doth many times arise off a desire of vain glory, and a spirit of envy.”<sup>38</sup> While it is difficult to determine the exact grounds of the conflict, it clearly generated considerable ill-feeling. Turner’s emotive self-defence, together with the epistles, suggests that she anticipated that her readers might be suspicious of the role she accorded to human faculties, and would share the view, voiced by Burrough, that her transgression lay in an act of willful self-assertion:

She never yet could waite upon God, to act for him, but hath runne in her own will, which is abomination to him, which is no acting for God, but for selfe, and for the Devill.<sup>39</sup>

It was that charge against which Turner (via the opening epistles) and other experimental Calvinist autobiographers sought most hard to defend themselves. Subject to the paradox of preparation within predestination, and mindful that her enterprise might be considered blasphemous, not only by Quakers, but by members of her own religious community, Turner’s autobiography worries away at

<sup>35</sup> Edward Burrough, *Something in Answer to a Book called Choice Experiences given forth by one Jane Turner* [n.p., n.pub.], p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Burrough, pp. 7, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Burrough, pp. 12, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Turner, pp. 6, 8, 9.



the issue of human agency. It does so not only through the epistles that attempt to legitimise her authorship, but also through the narrative itself.

Turner strives, with some measure of success, to write a narrative in which the two modes of reading – passive and experiential, and active and hermeneutic – are mutually supportive. Structured around a series of paired sections – Turner says she had “never seen anything written before in this manner and method”<sup>40</sup> – the “Experiences” tell, as one would expect, a story of increasing affective engagement with the Word. In the first she recounts how

I remember I was at this time like a stock or stone as to the true understanding of that which I read or heard...and yet at this time I was something in affection... my heart would melt (as I thought) yet I understood nothing, so as to have it seated in the understanding and judgement.<sup>41</sup>

In a subsequent Experience she finds (on hearing a sermon) that “very suddenly I thought I did discern and understand things more clearly and more distinctly than ever I did before that time, being much affected with it”,<sup>42</sup> and still later she notes “affectionate heart-workings”, and a “glimmering light” within.<sup>43</sup> However, the Experiences are brief in comparison with the lengthy Observations which follow them, and increasingly the text concerns itself with hermeneutic reading, although it does so in a manner designed not to give offence to those who insist on privileging passive experimentalism. Turner’s strategy was so successful that it continues even to mislead twentieth-century readers, usually more alert to tensions within seventeenth-century texts. The editors of *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth Century Englishwomen*, for example, suggest that Turner “shows that the relationship between doctrinally-required interpretation and experience is dialectical, neither experience nor interpretation taking absolute precedence”, citing the following passage to illustrate their argument:

Though some persons have much knowledge as to principles, and but little experience, yet none can have experience of that they do not understand, either in principle before they have had that experience, or else that they have learned that principle by experience; for (as I said before) all experience is either an effect of knowledge, or by it we learn knowledge, otherwise it cannot be experience.<sup>44</sup>

The point is that Turner’s densely self-recoiling syntax is indicative of a greater anxiety over the relationship between experience and interpretation than the editors of *Her Own Life* allow for, and

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<sup>39</sup> Burrough, pp. 8-9.

<sup>40</sup> Turner, sig. B9<sup>r</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> Turner, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Turner, pp. 22-23.

<sup>43</sup> Turner, p. 24.



while the passage does indeed suggest a dialectical engagement between the two, the emphasis is upon a defence of knowledge against a common perception of its secondary role in saintly life.<sup>45</sup> The nuances of Turner's representation of the relationship between experimental and hermeneutic perception may be further examined through a closer look at the first paired Experience and Observation. Having briefly told the reader in the first Experience of her early unconverted state, lacking understanding though not entirely devoid of heart-workings, Turner discourses at length on judgement and affection in the Observation that follows:

Fiftly, [sic] concerning my being so much affected with truth, though I understood it not, from thence I observe,  
*That ignorant persons in hearing truth may have their reason so far touched, that they may assent to it, and be much affected with it, and yet understand nothing so as to have it seated in the heart and judgement;* and because it is not seated in the heart and judgement, that I conceive is the reason why ignorant persons are so uncertain and so un-constant in their thoughts concerning truth... So truth not being rooted in the heart and judgement, though it spring up in much affection, yet it comes to nothing. And indeed ignorant persons many times are sooner affected, and doe seem to have more affection than others; the reason of that (I conceive) is the same also with that of the seed upon the stony ground, it sprang up suddenly, because it had not depth of earth; so its natural for ignorant persons to spring forth in affection, they having as it were nothing else to do but onely to be affected; their strength running all in one vein, or in one Chanel, they spend all in affection, while others that have more understanding have many other things to do, all the faculties of their souls being exercised, their strength is dispersed into many veins, weighing and pondering things in the heart and judgement, that it may have depth to root and settle there...and a little affection where there is judgement, is better than a great deal without judgement; yet much affection with a sound judgement is best of all.<sup>46</sup>

Turner is clearly preoccupied with the nature of a proper relationship between judgement and affection, and while the passage suggests that both are desirable, its primary concern is to etch out a greater role for judgement against what she perceives as ungrounded affection. The length at which she argues, and the manner in which she weighs one point against another, is itself a demonstration of the stability and breadth of her own faculties; it also suggests that she felt the issue to be potentially contentious. A residual anxiety on the subject is borne out by the rest of her text, which repeatedly returns to the same theme. She stresses the role of ongoing preparation in realising the work of the Spirit within - "the habits of grace, or fruits of the spirit do increase or decrease as we do more or less exercise that measure of them already received" - but lest she be charged with

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<sup>44</sup> Turner, p. 199, cited in the introduction to Graham and others, p. 4.

<sup>45</sup> Turner's emphasis becomes clearer if one compares her passage to one from Anne Wentworth's autobiography, which is more orthodox in its insistence upon the importance of the Spirit within a due recognition of the role played by the Letter: "The Spirit and the letter are nowhere contrary, but thou mayst think them so; and by not duly attending upon the Spirit in the letter mayst unnaturally set the letter to oppose the Spirit from whence it comes, to which it testifies, and whither it tends." Wentworth, p. 6.



deviating too far from a sense of human impotence, she follows this with the rejoinder that "in the work of conversion we are passive".<sup>47</sup> Her work closes with a renewed examination of the nature of experience, which she considers to be "a true sanctified knowledge, or special work of the Spirit" permitted only to saints, and easily misread by the unconverted:

there is much corrupt experience in the world, and persons have been as much mistaken in their experience, especially in these daies... and no marvel, when they leave the Scriptures as to rule & walk by the uncertain rule of their own *experience*, which many times is nothing but the *vision* of their own brains.<sup>48</sup>

It is the danger of misreading experience that leads her to insist upon its being measured against the rule of the Letter:

as to rule for the receiving of any principle one word of Scripture is more worth than all our experience...experience is more than a bare knowledge, it is either a begetter, or an effect of knowledge and hath alwaies relation to some rule...the holy Scripture is that rule.<sup>49</sup>

Turner was confident that, just as judgement would root affection, so Scripture could provide a measure of experience; Bunyan was to find the relationship between the two both more intimate, and more fraught.

Jane Turner's endeavour to author her own narrative of saving reading was doubly strained, beset by opposing pressures. As an experimental Calvinist she had to try to capture both the presence and the permanence of assurance while retaining a proper sense of her own impotence, while as a woman she had to assert her powers of judgement in order to validate her right to undertake such an enterprise. She responded to these competing pulls with lengthy defences of the relationship between judgement and affection, and enacted her control of that relationship in a text which was structured around binary sections in which experience was always prior to, and (by implication) separate from observation, yet in which the interpretation of experience carried most weight. If her narrative strategy was relatively successful in reconciling the two modes of reading, experiential and hermeneutic, it could only be so through an assertion of hermeneutic agency which meant that the anxiety shifted instead to the arena in which text and readership encountered one another. Turner's anticipation of offended readers, and the published evidence that remains of offence taken, suggests that her success could only be won at the expense of the orthodoxy of saving reading.

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<sup>46</sup> Turner, pp. 18-21.

<sup>47</sup> Turner, pp. 187, 189.

<sup>48</sup> Turner, pp. 96, 201.

<sup>49</sup> Turner, pp. 197-198.



Joseph Barrett's *God's Early Dealings with Mr Barrett*

Joseph Barrett also felt the need to reconcile the two experimental Calvinist models of reading, while maintaining a proper sense of humility in the face of an omnipotent God. Like Turner and others, he sought to do so through a manipulation of authorship and narrative. Unlike her, however, his gender did not oblige him to claim a rational authority already assumed, and this, combined with his Presbyterian background<sup>50</sup>, meant that his narrative was less explicit in its concern to defend the hermeneutic re-reading of experience (a mode more readily acceptable to moderate reconcilers). Instead, Barrett was more overtly preoccupied with the lack of an intense affective experience of the Word, and in the desire to come to terms with that absence, re-reading was integrated into a continuous narrative. Where Turner's defensive stance, and the obligation she felt as a Particular Baptist to produce a coherent narrative of salvation, led to a highly ordered binary structure, Barrett's lengthy paragraphs instead play out a *process* of reconciliation rather than arriving at any final resolution. Beneath this appearance of integration and reconciliation, however, remains a residual anxiety about the 'dead Letter' and the legitimacy of inscribing salvation. Like Turner's readers, Barrett could not altogether ignore the fact that his text compromised the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of reading, and that his peace was founded upon betrayal.

Like so many experimental Calvinist autobiographies, Barrett's text sought to avoid accusations of impropriety through being published posthumously. In the second epistle that prefaced the volume, Jo. Whitlock Senior wrote that

it was thought very expedient, together with the Sermon, to Publish some Things of his left under his own Hand (Penned for his own Private Use, and for the help of his after him, though God hath now ordered it that they shall be of further Use than his extraordinary Humility would have admitted) who while Living, would be prevailed with to communicate them to very few).<sup>51</sup>

Whitlock makes a point of stressing Barrett's lack of complicity in the business of publication in order to preserve his humility. Barrett himself remains silent throughout his text on the question of readership, but the condition of the manuscript he left behind suggests that his intentions were not as unequivocally private as the epistle claimed. Whitlock thanked God for inclining Barrett to use his talents

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<sup>50</sup> Like Turner, Barrett believed in free grace. He also distributed books by Joseph Alleine to the poor, and his editors remarked that "He much resembled his English Name-sake Mr. Joseph Allein, in zeal for God, and Love to Souls as far as he could go in his Capacity of a Private Christian". Barrett, pp. 61, 23. As discussed in chapter two, pp. 84-88, Alleine was also capable of stark expressions of the punitive nature of the Calvinist God.

<sup>51</sup> John Whitlock, 'To the Christian Reader', Barrett, sig. A6<sup>r</sup>.



in this way of penning down the gracious workings of his Heart, and that in long Hand, whereby this sore Breach in his Death is somewhat repaired, by his being thus made useful still.<sup>52</sup>

Barrett was himself sensitive to the proposition that his decision to write in long hand might be taken by future readers as an indication that he sought a wider audience. Remarking that his text was “for my own Eyes and Use, and not another’s, though writ in long hand”<sup>53</sup>, the very fact that he felt it necessary to utter the defence suggests otherwise. That suspicion is borne out by the epistle to the second part of the volume (containing miscellaneous papers) in which the editors note that

Several things of his, and (upon many Accounts we have reason to conclude) valuable ones, are locked up from being publicly useful, by being written in Characters: But blessed be God that so ordered it, that so much of the good Treasure of this Scribe instructed to the Kingdom of Heaven, this well-furnished Housholder (sic) is left unlocked, and stands open for publick Use.<sup>54</sup>

It seems that Barrett distinguished between different levels of privacy in his writing, and that his autobiography lay at the public end of the spectrum. In this light, the role played by posthumous publication in mediating between the author’s act of assertion and the strictures of a theology that insisted on man’s impotence, becomes even more apparent. Predictably, that mediation was expressed in terms of a paradox that enabled the author to be both present in, and absent from, his narrative of salvation: “As this righteous Abel though Dead yet Speaks, so he may actually Live amongst us still”.<sup>55</sup>

For Barrett, as for Turner, authoring one’s own narrative of salvation involved a degree of personal agency that was hard to accommodate within experimental Calvinism, due to a model of saving reading which privileged passive, affective experience of the Spirit rather than active interpretation of its word. If Barrett was more successful than Turner in negotiating the problem of authorial agency, he was arguably less so in producing a narrative strategy of resolution between experiential and hermeneutic reading. One might expect a Presbyterian background to be more encouraging of attempts to ‘reconcile’ affection and judgement than Turner’s Independent community. However, in spite of the praise that Barrett received for his “well-ballasted zeal”,<sup>56</sup> that moderating impulse could itself become a problem: he was often anxious at his very lack of anxiety. In fact, he appears more pressured into concern at the lack of a clear experiential relationship with the Spirit than his Baptist counterpart:

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<sup>52</sup> John Whitlock, ‘To the Christian Reader’, Barrett, sig. A7<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>53</sup> Barrett, p. 64.

<sup>54</sup> John and Jo. Whitlock, ‘Epistle to the Second Part’, sig. A3<sup>r</sup> – A3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> John Whitlock, ‘To the Christian Reader’, Barrett, sig. A5<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>56</sup> John Whitlock, ‘To the Christian Reader’, Barrett, sig. A3<sup>r</sup>.



from the Sufferings of others of God's People, I begun to argue my self into an Expectation of the like Trials; I delighted much in the reading of a Book, Entitled [*The Saints Encouragement in Bad Times*] [sic] wherein the Triumphant Deaths of several of the late faithful Witnesses and Martyrs of Jesus Christ is briefly related; my Heart was so affected with those full Streams of Joy and Consolation they met with in the midst of their Sufferings, that I begun passionately to desire the like Sufferings, in hopes of their Comforts, and made it frequently one of my Requests to God in my Secret Addresses to him, that if it was his Will he would Honour me with such a Death. I confess, I know not what to make of this; I would hope there was something that was good in it, some good Affections: Yet I am afraid there was a great deal of that which was bad, which I have Cause to be ashamed of and humbled from much Pride and Self-conceitedness, as though I was able to Drink of that Cup, too little Regard of and Zeal for God's Honour, which I soon discovered and endeavoured to Correct.<sup>57</sup>

The passage is an indication of one way in which works of practical piety could impact upon their readers. Barrett tries to distance himself from his desire for an intense affective experience of the Spirit, but he becomes even more troubled by his "lack of feeling" towards the end of life.

Of late years I have been more solicitous and doubtful about the Estate of my soul, for indeed, till of late I have gone on in a fine smooth way, enjoying (as I really thought at least) Spiritual Communion with God in his Ordinances, and so ordinarily enjoyed inward Peace...but of late I begun to fear, least that which I called Peace should prove no better than Security and Presumption at last. ...considering that I was a Child of wrath by Nature, and the Necessity of Conversion, as that without it there is no Salvation; and further considering how great a change that makes, as from a State of Sin to a State of Grace, Terms as different as Heaven and Hell, and that therefore this change must needs be visible and remarkable; And further, thinking of the Experience of many Christians, who can say at such and such a Time, by such and such Means, the Lord begun to Work upon me; I begun to have sad thoughts of myself, who can say nothing certainly, know not when or how any such great and saving change was wrought upon me.<sup>58</sup>

Concerned by the absence of a clear moment of conversion, and caught between the two potential sins of security and despair (he observes that "I dread to think of flattering my self with ungrounded Hopes, and yet I would fear erring on the other Hand also"<sup>59</sup>), Barrett is reassured by a number of works of practical piety, together with the advice of Mr Whitlock; all tell him it is not necessary to know the precise time.<sup>60</sup> Barrett concludes:

<sup>57</sup> Barrett, p. 48. It has not been possible to trace the author of *The Saints Encouragement in Bad Times*.

<sup>58</sup> Barrett, pp. 38, 51-53.

<sup>59</sup> Barrett, p. 53.

<sup>60</sup> The works that Barrett cites are: Henry Hickman, *The Believer's Duty Towards the Spirit and the Spirit's Office towards Believers* (London: Sa. Gellibrand, 1665); and 'Mr Firman's *Real Christians*', of which it has not been possible to trace further details.



And therefore would be no longer curious in my Enquiries about this Matter, in which I can never in an ordinary way obtain full Satisfaction, but rest satisfied if I can but find the Work done, though I cannot tell when and how, and not at once both Torment my own Soul, and gratifie and humour the Devil, who next to Grace, envieth a Christian's peace and Comfort.<sup>61</sup>

Affective transformation is replaced by reflection and judgement, but unlike Turner he cannot order his reading into binary sections of Experience and Observation because he is never as confident of his experience in the first place. Instead his sentences spawn sub-clause after sub-clause in the effort to give a balanced account of the difficulties Barrett encountered in reading his salvation. Hermeneutic reading allowed Barrett to postpone the finding of absolute answers: whenever he is uncertain what to think he resorts to strategies of deferral, hoping that he is "right in the main", and noting that "as yet I cannot fully perswade myself that this is all, a little more time will better satisfy me".<sup>62</sup> If Barrett did not explicitly champion hermeneutic agency, nonetheless his text could only enact a narrative of saving reading through it.

However, while Barrett of necessity exploited hermeneutic reading, there remained a residual anxiety about the relationship between autobiography, judgement and affection, and it was connected to a long-seated and pervasive unease about writing itself, an act that he could not help associating with duty and formalism. In a passage worth citing at length, Barrett recounts the distress he felt as a child in conforming to an approved relationship with scripture, and his ambivalence towards the role that writing played in helping him to resolve his difficulties:

One thing... which made me greatly to question the sincerity of my Heart; It was my Fathers Use when at home, every Lords-day in the Afternoon to call us to an Account, what we remembred (sic) of the Sermons he had Preached that day; now I could remember but little, and what I did very confusedly... So that I have many Times secretly wished that Part of the Sabbath over, which occasioned many sad thoughts of Heart in me, because I could not make it out to my self that I counted the Sabbath my delight... thus it continued with me a considerable Time, my Heart being in a very uneasie Case all the while; I then having just learnt to Write, attempted to take something after him, and towards Night would get alone to look over what I had written (which alas, was but little, here and there a bit) hoping that this might be some help to me; but when by those hints I have got something considerable pretty ready in my Thoughts in my Chamber, yet when I have been called down to give an Account to him, my Mind hath been on a sudden so ruffled and disordered that I could scarce say one Word, which troubled me still the more... sometimes I would take my Paper a long (sic) with me, and holding it out of his sight ( for Fear he should have been Angry with me) when I have been at a loss would cast my Eye upon it; this I observed, some took offence at, but once my Father observing me, contrary to my Expectation, with

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<sup>61</sup> Barrett, pp. 52-53.

<sup>62</sup> Barrett, pp. 56, 54-55.



great tenderness bid me if I had writ any Thing to read it, and afterwards directed and much encouraged me in it; But alas! I could write little, which after a while made me very desirous to learn Characters, which after I had resolved upon I soon attained to, and by frequent Practice came to some Perfection in them, which have since been of great use to me, and have sometimes made me capable of being instrumental of the good of others Souls, for which I unfeignedly Bless the Lord...but then alas, a new trouble arose, I was full of fears lest I should hereby take occasion to forget God's Word, and satisfie my self with the bare Reading of it, to which I found my base Heart enclined, against which my good Father gave me a caution: But I endeavoured almost from my first beginning to Write, that it might be otherwise, which I have many Times since with much Comfort reflected upon, as a greater Sign of the Sincerity of my Heart, than the former was of the contrary.<sup>63</sup>

Barrett's ambivalence towards his use of characters as a means to resolve his childhood difficulties with the Word shadows the writing of his autobiography, but is also answered by it, for it is only through further inscription and hermeneutic reconciliation that he is able to accept both as signs of sincerity and salvation.<sup>64</sup>

Jane Turner attempted to negotiate a relationship between the two experimental Calvinist models of reading that was capable of sustaining a narrative of salvation; she did so through a binary structure that allowed her to depict experience and affection as prior and originating, while dwelling at much greater length on the role of observation and judgement. However, while this strategy allowed her to reinstate the importance of hermeneutic reading, such a move implied an elevation of human agency over divine presence that could not be readily accepted by her readers. Joseph Barrett was less explicit in his approach towards hermeneutic reading, but ultimately went further in assimilating it into his narrative of salvation. Unlike Turner, he was less confident that he possessed an affective relationship with the Word, and more ambivalent about the role inscription might play in capturing conversion. However, posthumous publication and a less overt narrative strategy gave Barrett the sleight of hand needed to accommodate both human agency and divine omnipotence. His text enacts the hermeneutic equivalent of a double testimony: through a narrative strategy of reconciliation, it privileges re-reading and self-validates its own enterprise of restoring assurance through the written word. Together, Turner and Barrett provide examples of ways in which experimental Calvinists manipulated the authorial and narrative features of spiritual autobiography in order to write themselves into a story of saving reading. While the form allowed this to be achieved more successfully than either diary or conversion narrative, it was a move that, ultimately, could only be made through reinstating human, hermeneutic agency in the absence of divine presence, and in the

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<sup>63</sup> Barrett, pp. 46-47.

<sup>64</sup> Barrett's bashfulness clearly persisted into adulthood, and he continued to use writing as a tool by which to avoid speaking: at prayer meetings, "such was his great Modesty, that he seldom spoke himself, but wrote his Thought and put them into a Friends (sic) hands (with a charge of privacy as to the Author) who read them



face of more orthodox passivity and experientialism. Considered against this background, Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* is not typical of spiritual autobiography and its negotiation of the two experimental Calvinist models of reading, but exceptional in its ultimate withdrawal from a potential reconciliation that could be won only through unorthodox means.

### John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*

Unlike Turner or Barrett, Bunyan appears confident at the outset about the function served by the authorship and publication of his autobiography. That confidence, however, is undermined and qualified by the process of his textual negotiation between the two experimental Calvinist models of reading, and the text draws to a close with a careful denial of his authorial agency, and with demonstrations of infirmity and continuing conflict. *Grace Abounding* provides famously vivid accounts of passive experiential reading as Bunyan is assaulted by scriptures; like the texts produced by Turner and Barrett, it attempts to reconcile the antagonism between narrator and Word through hermeneutic re-reading. However, unlike them, Bunyan finally retreats from his own success, unable to countenance the departure from the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of reading that it implies.

*Grace Abounding* (unlike *Choice Experiences* or *An Account of his Holy Life*) opens not with epistles that attempt to mediate between writer and reader, but with a direct address from the author himself to "my dear children".<sup>65</sup> In 'A Preface: Or brief Account of the publishing of this Work: Written by the Author thereof, and dedicated to those whom God hath counted him worthy to beget to Faith, by his Ministry in the Word', Bunyan envisages a relationship with his readers that is ministerial in nature, and his venture into publication derives authority from a position neither Turner nor Barrett could occupy<sup>66</sup>. Bunyan does not seek to remove himself from the scene of publication; rather, it is an attempt to restore his presence to a flock from which he has been removed by imprisonment:

I being taken from you in presence, and so tied up, that I cannot perform that duty that from God doth lie upon me, to you-ward, for your further edifying and building up in Faith and Holiness, &c. Yet that you may see my Soul hath fatherly care and desire after your spiritual and everlasting welfare; I now once again...do look yet after you all.<sup>67</sup>

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towards the close of the Exercise", John Whitlock, 'To the Christian Reader', Barrett. sig. A4<sup>r</sup>. Writing was a means by which Barrett was able to transform nervous inadequacy into desirable modesty.

<sup>65</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, sig. A4<sup>v</sup>. All references are to the 1666 first edition, unless otherwise stated, although for research purposes the additions made to the undated third [1674?] and fifth [1680] editions have also been taken into account. For discussion of the three editions, and the uncertain date of the third, see Stachniewski, *Grace Abounding*, pp. xlv-xlv.

<sup>66</sup> Turner was of course precluded by her gender, Barrett was advised to go into trade by his father, in spite of his leanings towards the Ministry. Barrett struggles against dissatisfaction at the loss of a vocation; perhaps he felt that the ability to preach would have helped his problematic oral relationship with the Word. Barrett, pp.49, 55-56.

<sup>67</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, sigs A2<sup>r</sup> - A2<sup>v</sup>.



From the beginning, then, Bunyan claims his authorship as an extension of his divinely-endorsed ministry, and his story is placed firmly at the service of God's greater narrative in order that "others may be put in remembrance of what he hath done for their souls, by reading his work upon me".<sup>68</sup> (To the extent that Bunyan admits any more personal function for his text, it is, familiarly, as a kind of aide-memoire of grace and of vanquished despair: "I can remember my fears, and doubts, and sad moneths, [sic] with comfort; they are as the head of Goliath [sic] in my hand".<sup>69</sup>) Bunyan's preface firmly aligns his autobiography with God's narrative, and is at ease in announcing and occupying the role of author in that context.

However, while the preface asserts Bunyan's confident authorship and the conformity of his text with God's work, the narrative itself enacts the difficulty Bunyan found in conforming to a model of saving reading that was passive and experiential. In the attempt to overcome his struggle with Scripture his narrative begins to depart from the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of reading, endorsing the value of active hermeneutic reading as producing more dependable results than the waverings of experience. Unlike Turner or Barrett, the Bible has a far more tangible presence in his autobiography, and the physical intensity with which Bunyan is buffeted by competing scriptures underscores his passivity in his relationship with the Word. Voices "suddenly dart" into his soul and make "such a seizure upon my spirit" with their "fiery force" it is as though "God had in very wrath to my soul given me up unto them, to be carried away with them, as with a mighty whirlwind".<sup>70</sup> Unable to tell whether such words come from God or the devil, Bunyan's resistance to this assault is necessarily expressed in terms just as involuntary. Constrained from contesting either his passivity or the experiential intensity of his encounters with Scripture, rebellion erupts in an urge to blaspheme so great he is as one possessed:

I have been as if my mouth would have spoken that word whether I would or no; and in so strong a measure was this temptation upon me, that often I have been ready to clap my hand under my chin, to hold my mouth from opening; and to that end also I have had thoughts at other times to leap with my head downward into some muck-hill hole or other, to keep my mouth from speaking.<sup>71</sup>

Bunyan's passive encounters with the Word culminate in an episode in which he is hounded by two passages, one telling of Esau's "unpardonable sin" (which he fears he may also have committed),

<sup>68</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, sig. A3<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>69</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, sig. A4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 27.

<sup>71</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 28. On Bunyan's verbal blasphemy, see Vera Jean Camden, 'Blasphemy and Belief: John Bunyan and the Word' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Virginia, 1986).



and the other bearing the message "My grace is sufficient". The visitation of these phrases mirror the slidings of his spiritual frames between hope and despair:

for this about the sufficiency of grace and that of Esau's parting with his birthright, would be like a pair of scales within my mind, sometimes one end would be uppermost, and sometimes again the other, according to which would be my peace or trouble<sup>72</sup>.

Bunyan can believe in the promise of grace on some occasions and not on others:

For about a fortnight before, I was looking on this very place ['My grace is sufficient to thee'] and then I thought it could not come near my Soul with comfort, and threw down my Book in a pet; but now it was as if it had arms of grace so wide, that it could not only enclose me, but many more besides.<sup>73</sup>

When in a reprobate frame of despair, he is simply unable to read, and has to throw the book down. In his infirmity, unable to seize hold of either possibility (election or reprobation), Bunyan hopes that the warring passages will fight it out amongst themselves, and this is indeed what happens:

They boulted both upon me at a time, and did work and struggle strangely in me for a while; at last, that about *Esau's* birth-right began to wax weak, and withdraw, and vanish; and this about the sufficiency of Grace prevailed, with peace and joy.<sup>74</sup>

However, the scripture on Esau soon returns to him, for its 'defeat' only re-installs the polarity (born of the absolutes of salvation and reprobation) that gives rise to alternation:

But, notwithstanding all these helps and blessed words of grace, yet that of Esau's selling of his birth-right, would still at times distress my Conscience; for though I had been most sweetly comforted, and that but just before, yet when that came into mind, 'twould make me fear again. I could not be quite rid thereof, 'twould every day be with me.<sup>75</sup>

In the absence of grace, Bunyan instead has to assert himself as reader, 'inserting' reasoned analysis into his relationship with Scripture, in order to effect the resolution otherwise missing. He is no longer a mere receptacle for the word, but has to learn to forge another kind of intimacy: he endeavours to "come close" to "the most fearful and terrible Scriptures" on Esau, to "read and consider them, and to weigh their scope and tendence".<sup>76</sup> To 'come close' to something you have

<sup>72</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 54.

<sup>73</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 54.

<sup>74</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 57.

<sup>75</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 28.

<sup>76</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 60.



first to be separate from it, and so Bunyan is actually recasting the relationship from one of possession to one of greater objectivity – one might say rationality. The reader, not the text, is now the adjudicator. He breaks down the scriptures on Esau into sections, uses a repeated triadic structure of argument for the comparison of Esau's sin to his own, and finds encouragement from collating the passage with other scriptures.<sup>77</sup> Eventually he arrives at the conclusion that his own sin is not the same as Esau's, and is not, therefore, necessarily unpardonable. At this point there "remained only the hinder part of the Tempest, for the thunder was gone beyond me".<sup>78</sup>

Bunyan, then, unable to find any stability in a passive, experiential relationship with the Word, found greater peace through owning and acknowledging the power of his intellect, bringing his own judgement to bear upon his experience of scripture. Like Turner and Barrett, he reinstated a hermeneutic approach at the core of saving reading. Felicity A. Nussbaum has remarked that

the autobiographical text begins to compete for authority with the Scriptural texts... While Bunyan seems to proclaim the authority of God's Word, the force of the autobiographical text suggests that Bunyan is creating a substitute personal text to replace the Scriptures as a devotional guide.<sup>79</sup>

Bunyan's excursion into hermeneutical reading does 'compete for authority', not so much with Scripture itself, but rather with the experimental Calvinist insistence on privileging a passive, experiential relationship with Scripture. It is, however, a competition that Bunyan cannot afford to win, and he rapidly withdraws from the implications of his dissidence, stripping his judgement of the ability to secure assurance and placing that power firmly in Christ. Although the storm had almost passed,

some drops did still remain, that now and then would fall upon me: but because my former frights and anguish were very sore and deep, therefore it did oft befall me still as it befalleth those that have been scared with fire, I thought every voice was fire, fire; every little touch would hurt my tender Conscience.<sup>80</sup>

He only finally finds peace by surrendering himself once more to a passive experiential encounter with the Word:

Fearing lest yet all was not right, suddenly this sentence fell upon my Soul, *Thy righteousness is in Heaven*; and methought withall, I saw with the eyes of my

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<sup>77</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, pp. 60-63. That triadic approach is reinforced in the fifth edition, which inserts an additional triadic section into what was paragraph 177 in the first edition, and which appears as paragraph 223 in the fifth edition.

<sup>78</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 63.

<sup>79</sup> Felicity A. Nussbaum, 'By these Words I was Sustained': Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*, *English Literary History*, 49 (1982), 18-34 (pp. 21-22).

<sup>80</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 63.



Soul Jesus Christ at Gods right hand, there, I say, as my Righteousness... I also saw moreover, that it was not my good frame of Heart that made my Righteousness better, nor yet my bad frame that made my Righteousness worse: for my Righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, *the same yesterday, to day, and for ever*, Heb. 13.8.<sup>81</sup>

Bunyan ultimately finds stability in locating righteousness outside of himself, and in underscoring the limitations of his own shifting frames of interpretation. Truth, the passage claims, is outside of, and anterior to, perception – a position in alignment with the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of reading. Vincent Newey has articulated the contradiction in which such a claim is embedded:

*Grace Abounding* presents in the end a paradox: though distrusting subjective interpretation and making, seeing them as a source of error, hostile to faith, malign opposites of God's meaning resident in the Word, Bunyan was so far their exponent as to leave the world a book for all time, equating truth not only with the events of a personal life but with that which is personally created in the act of inscription.<sup>82</sup>

However, while the paradox remains as an unresolved tension in Bunyan's reading, and the writing of his reading, Newey underestimates the extent to which (unlike Turner or Barrett) he struggles to retreat from the path of hermeneutic agency. After the resolution of the two competing scriptures through the recognition that his righteousness rests in Christ, the narrative of *Grace Abounding* loses steam until, after a few pages, it reaches one of two concluding sections: 'A brief Account of the Authors Call to the Work of the Ministry' (the second is 'A brief Account of the Authors Imprisonment'). If the subtitle, and the lack of chronology, breaks the previous narrative thrust, nonetheless the section is not merely a disjointed attempt to encompass the writer's present as well as his past within his autobiography; crucially it reworks the notion of authorship presented in the opening preface in defence against the dangerous territory into which the narrative had wandered. The preface suggested that Bunyan's authorship was an extension of his ministry, but the closing account deliberately negates any personal authority that might derive from his work in performing the Word, in a gesture of proper humility. He compares the preacher to a musical instrument, itself inanimate:

A tinkling Cymbal is an instrument of Musick with which a skilful player can make such melodious and heart-inflaming Musick, that all who hear him play, can scarcely hold from dancing; and yet, behold, the Cymbal hath not life, neither comes the musick from it, but because of the art of him that playes therewith: so

<sup>81</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 63.

<sup>82</sup> Vincent Newey, 'With the eyes of my understanding': Bunyan, Experience, and Acts of Interpretation', in *John Bunyan: Conventicle and Parnassus*, ed. by N.H. Keeble, pp. 189-216 (pp. 207-208).



then the instrument at last may come to nought and perish, though in times past such musick hath been made upon it.

Just thus I saw it was and will be with them who have Gifts, but want saving-Grace.<sup>83</sup>

The preface suggested that Bunyan's authorship of his autobiography was an extension of his ministry: the passage above implies that, just as the minister's preaching may assist the salvation of others, but not his own, so his writing cannot effect the conversion of his mis-reading into saving reading.

After 'A brief account of the Authors Imprisonment', which re-emphasises a passive, experiential relationship with the Word<sup>84</sup>, Bunyan closes *Grace Abounding* with a list of conclusions similar in form to the 'demonstrations' that ended many conversion narratives.<sup>85</sup> However, unlike those 'evidences', which sought to bring closure to narratives of doubt and despair, fixing faith through 'the still of the mark',<sup>86</sup> Bunyan's conclusions repeatedly stress the ongoing nature of his spiritual waverings. Observing that "I find to this day seven abominations in my heart" including "Inclinings to unbelief" and "Suddenlie to forget the love and mercie that Christ manifesteth", and that "These things I continuallie see and feel, and am afflicted and oppressed with", they finish with the reminder that Bunyan's inability to read his salvation with any security is in fact a manifestation of divine will, for "the Wisdom of God doth order [his doubts] for my good", showing him "the necessity of fleeing to Jesus".<sup>87</sup> In this hankering after past structures, this gesture towards resolutions that offered no real resolution, Bunyan betrays his discomfort with the project of inscribing saving reading. Unable to embrace the possibilities offered by spiritual autobiography through extended narrative and the manipulation of authorial agency to resolve the experimental Calvinist anxiety of reading, he clings to a model of passive experimentalism that can never stabilise his relationship with the Word and his perception of salvation, rather than assert the agency implied by hermeneutic reading.

### Conclusion

Like diaries and conversion narratives, spiritual autobiographies could only alleviate anxiety over salvation through an assertion of hermeneutic agency at odds with experimental Calvinist orthodoxy, which, while it acknowledged the Letter, privileged the Spirit. The tensions generated by this conflict were negotiated through a manipulation of the authorial role, and through narrative structures that

<sup>83</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 285.

<sup>84</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, pp. 87, 88, 91, 93.

<sup>85</sup> There are six conclusions in the first edition, with an added paragraph in the third edition that in the fifth appears as a numbered entity on its own, making seven. Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 94.

<sup>86</sup> Ricoeur, p. 345. For discussion of the demonstrations that close many conversion narratives, and of Ricoeur's analysis of the mark, see chapter five p. 161-162.

<sup>87</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, p. 94.



allowed the re-integration of interpretation as a necessary and, indeed, dominant part of saving reading. The autobiographies of Turner and Barrett provide examples of the range of strategies by which this was achieved by both Independents and Presbyterians across the period. Against this background, Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* emerges as typical in its concern to resolve a fraught relationship with the Word, but exceptional in its refusal to deviate from his theology in the process of so doing. Whereas spiritual autobiography in general represents the culmination of the experimental Calvinist developing art of reading, *Grace Abounding* remains as a testament to the enduring perplexity that dogged attempts to read salvation.



## Afterword

The experimental Calvinist community of readers, made anxious by the strictures of their theology, sought to write themselves into saving reading through diaries, conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies. In order to do so, they had to renegotiate an orthodoxy of reading which privileged an affective experience of the Spirit over interpretation of its Letter. Diarists experimented with performative inscription in an attempt to capture both the presence, and the permanence, of assurance, but could not escape the fundamental contradiction on which their works were founded: the notion of preparation within predestination. Conversion narratives originated in an oral enactment of conversion, but, like diaries, were undermined by their own ontology, which seemed to imply the blasphemy that sainthood could be made visible. In their published form they retreated towards the more humble ambition of preparation, and a greater preoccupation with the permanence, rather than the presence, of assurance. Attempts made to secure permanence through an engagement with the materiality of the written word as a mark or token of grace met with limited success, and instead the published testimonies began to explore the potential of narrative for resolving tensions in the reading of salvation. That exploitation of narrative was furthered through spiritual autobiographies, which also continued the move towards a more disembodied relationship between author, text and reader. Such texts could only redress anxiety over salvation through an assertion of hermeneutic agency over experiential passivity. Ultimately, the experimental Calvinist community needed to depart from their orthodoxy of reading in order to accommodate it – a paradox worthy of the theology on which their relationship with the Word was based. In finding strategies for enacting that paradox, their diaries, conversion narratives and spiritual autobiographies constitute a developing art of reading salvation.

There remains the question of why we should be concerned with a belief system apparently so alien to us, and its impact upon the reading practices of a community whose concerns seem remote from our own. The interest lies partly in the way experimental Calvinist negotiations of the two models of engagement with the Word, hermeneutic and experiential, expose something of our own habits of reading. One might ask to what extent those 'structuring oppositions' continue to inform our own linguistic endeavours, and to what degree they have undergone transformation. Academic discourse has firmly aligned itself with the hermeneutic model, and religious belief, or the lack of it, is no less implicated in its rubric of reading than it was for experimental Calvinists. Paul de Man, for example, has remarked that



I intend to take the divine out of reading. The experience of the divine is one that is totally conceivable, but which I don't think is compatible with reading... Generally, the act of faith is not an act of reading, or for me is not compatible with reading.<sup>1</sup>

De Man's secular ability to choose between modes of reading would seem to dismiss in one sweep the tensions that plagued experimental Calvinist readers. Where they privileged 'experimental' (i.e. experiential) reading, de Man insists that reading can only ever be experimental in a more recent sense of the word – i.e. provisional. It is, as Jonathan Goldberg has argued, a position that underpins current critical industry: "The possibility of criticism rests on the most insecure of bases, the endless decipherability of texts – and their endless withholding of ultimate answers".<sup>2</sup> If the experimental Calvinist Bible also offered endless decipherability (albeit premised on a belief in ultimate revelation), it should come as no surprise to see a secular transfusion of that imperative to keep on reading. It goes some way towards explaining the fascination of the undecidability and paradox of the theology of double predestination and the reading of salvation, a fascination that is equally a narcissistic reflection upon our own condition.

Perhaps we should also ask ourselves whether, in our reversal of the experimental Calvinist orthodoxy of reading (a reversal which elevates hermeneutic reading above - and often to the exclusion of - experiential reading) we have not suffered a linguistic loss that diminishes both us and our ability to understand the difficulties that beset experimental Calvinists. The challenge is to recognise "the blind spot within the theoretical frame itself",<sup>3</sup> and to ask whether, even in an age without God, there might be other means, both within and beyond academic discourse, of engaging with the performative dimension of language. But that, as they say, is another story, for which we must find a different way of reading.

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<sup>1</sup> Paul de Man, in Robert Moynihan, 'Interview with Paul de Man', *The Yale Review*, 73, (1984), 584-589 (pp. 586-7).

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Goldberg, *Voice Terminal Echo – Postmodernism and English Renaissance Texts* (New York and London, Methuen, 1986), p.7.

<sup>3</sup> Goldberg, p.149.



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